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HONOR
CARMICHAEL





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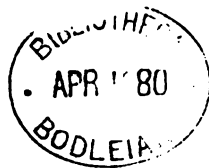
A STUDY.

BY HENRIETTA A. DUFF,

AUTHOR OF "VIRGINIA: A ROMAN SKETCH," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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CONTENTS

OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.

CHAP.	Page.
I.—PRELUDE AND SOLO	1
II.—DUETTO	30
III.—TRIO	64
IV.—ST. MARK'S ROAD	117
V.—HAPPIER THAN HAPPY!	130
VI.—THE FULL CUP	145
VII.—PROTOPLASMS!	156
VIII.—PIERREFORT	171
IX.—AN AWKWARD MEETING	185
X.—A STILL MORE AWKWARD MEETING	203
XI.—ÉCUME DE MER	218
XII.—A CALENDAR OF FEASTS	238
XIII.—PULLING DOWN THE HEDGE	253
XIV.—TEL LIVRE D'HEURES	267
XV.—TWO ARRIVALS	285



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HONOR CARMICHAEL.

CHAPTER I.

PRELUDE AND SOLO.

"The songs of dead seasons, that wander
On wings of articulate words."

A. C. SWINBURNE.

OMEWHERE in the south of France, not very far back from the high road between Arles and Marseilles, there stands, and has stood for centuries, an old turretted castle called the Château de Coulanges. It is built of grey stone, and has high slanting roofs, and deep-set windows overrun with

flowers, and a *jardin Anglais* enclosed in a court at the back.

The country round is very rich and fertile. There is a river, like a silver thread, running through it, and innumerable villages are dotted all along the riverside. There are miles of vineyards and corn-fields, meadows of flax, and valleys alight with pink saragin and golden maize. The beautiful waving woods grow close up to the house, from the uppermost windows of which you can catch a glimpse of Marseilles, and its busy glittering harbour, while beyond gleams the blue unfathomable sea, welling into the bluer illimitable horizon.

Nevertheless this Château de Coulanges has a dreary, deserted, "Moated Grange" sort of look; or, at least, it has such a look in its pictures, for I never saw the place in my life, only a great many drawings of it, painted and otherwise, and all hanging up, nicely framed and glazed, in

the bright trim little sitting-room of an old Frenchwoman, who had known it and loved it well in her youth—in the home of Madame Pléon in fact—Madame Pléon, of whom we shall see more by and bye.

The château has changed hands since her day. It has passed away from the old family, and become the home of some strangers from over the sea. These strangers are good people, wealthy and wise. They have built schools and established soup-kitchens. They are generous towards the Church, and liberal towards the poor, and do more in a year for their tenants and workpeople than the last Lord of Coulanges did in his lifetime. Their little children go scampering through the woods, waking up the echoes with their shrill ringing laughter, and painting out the shadows with their gay young presence. Their sons are fine fellows, treading carefully in their father's footsteps.

Their daughters are graceful and fair (one afterwards married the Duc de Provence, and the other an Anglo-Indian officer, whose fortunes she followed in peace and in war). They are well spoken of far and near, highly respected, greatly esteemed; but the memory of the old family is still fondly cherished, and *their* absence is still deeply deplored—at least, so says Madame Pléon; and it may be true, for it is the way of the world not to know when it is well off, and to waste itself in unending regrets.

Do you wonder what all this has to do with Honor Carmichael? How the history of that old château in Provence can affect the simple story of a London clergyman's child? Wait and see.

This is one of the strangest things of life. We can never tell what influences will touch us, what winds will blow on us, what strange unexpected beings may be caught up with us and whirled round and

round in the same turn of Fortune's wheel. The hand we never grasped, the man we never met, the life we never heard of, or only heard of, perhaps, to mock at, may yet make or mar our fortunes—nay, may one day rob us of the apple of our eye, or shower down upon us the golden fruit of delight.

The waters of the Rhine and the Moselle, after wandering through many different lands, meet and marry at last beside grim Coblentz. Two lives run for years far apart from each other, and then suddenly converging meet, and are merged one in the other for evermore.

Do you understand now? Can you catch the sound of the waters? the meaning of the song?

It is the dead hand of Saint Gregory the Illuminator that can alone consecrate the living Patriarch of Armenia. It is always the Past which makes the Present.

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Such a bright sunshiny day, though it was scarcely yet spring. Already there was gold upon the fields and green upon the trees, and blossoms, white as hoar-frost and sweet as May-blooms, strewn thickly over all the orchards and apple-gardens in fair Provence. For a French March is as an English May, except indeed that his lordship, the sun, is even then less fickle to the vines than he is to the hops, and loves better to laugh in the radiant blue eyes of the south, than to smile and frown alternately in the grim grey face of the north.

He was laughing now, laughing broadly and bravely, as he streamed unchecked through open windows of the west *salon* of the Château de Coulanges, laughing as he danced over the shiny *plaqué* floor, and touched with his glittering fingers the hem of a dusky robe, and the ripple of some soft brown hair.

The owner of the dusky robe and the

soft brown hair, was a girl of about twenty years of age, with a pair of dark Southern eyes, and a pale grave face that had a story in it. She was playing to herself as she sat before the piano in the far corner of the room—to herself and the sunshine only, for there was no one else present. It was a pretty tune she was playing, a soft, dreamy, sing-song sort of thing, full of quaint running variations, and odd breaks and bursts of melody flowing in here and there. But she did not seem to think much about it herself. She was, in truth, thinking about something totally different.

By and by the sun sank to sleep on his bed of crimson and gold, and the church-bell in the neighbouring village chimed the Ave Maria, and tolled the death of another day.

The player went on playing, however, striking the chords more clearly as the

twilight deepened, and darkness came on apace; and the windows being still open, the music went streaming out, as the chill cold night air came streaming in.

She went on thinking too—thinking of her story, of course. It was a hapless little story, common enough, but none the less sad for that. She had loved once, and had been betrothed to the man she loved, and all had gone well for a time. Then her father had interposed, and the lover had been banished. She would never see him again, for her father on his death-bed had claimed a promise from her, which promise would always stand between her and happiness, like the cherubim with the flaming sword at Eden's gate.

That was the end of her story—at least, so she thought. But, for once, Comtesse Edmée de Coulanges was wrong. There was another chapter to be added to

it to-day, and yet another in the far future, before the Great Author should write the word *Finis* to it all.

But Comtesse Edmée was not so selfish as to be wholly absorbed in her own love-story. She would never have another, but Arlotte, her young sister, should have one, and a far happier one than her own. Arlotte's story should be a beautiful story, all full of light, and love, and happiness, the mere reflection of which would gladden her elder sister's heart. Yes, she could see the little bride in her trailing shimmering satins and her floating veil, her dark eyes alight with love, and her sweet lips quivering with happiness. The bridegroom was not quite so distinct. But then, to be sure, he need not appear just yet, seeing that the little bride herself was barely sixteen. He would arrive in due season, of course. In the meantime, where was his destined bride ?

Comtesse Edmée rose from the piano, and went to the window and looked out. The window gave upon the English garden and the courtyard. There was no one to be seen. She went back to her music.

Little Comtesse Arlotte was accustomed to ramble about the place by herself. There were no wolves, not even in sheep's clothing, in the woods of Coulanges, and the people round were their own people, honest, simple, ignorant folks, who troubled their heads but little about changes of dynasties or Spanish marriages, but who had mourned sincerely the death of Count Armand de Coulanges, their lord, and who were loyal and true to his daughters, who now reigned in his stead. So Arlotte roamed about at her own sweet will, fearless and free.

At last she came in; not in her usual laughing, dancing manner, with a smile in her eyes, and a merry word on her lips,

but slowly and silently, pushing back the heavy curtain that hung before the door, and then leaning against it, and looking at Edmée in a strange, sweet, bewildered sort of way.

Edmée looked up at her and smiled a welcome. She had been thinking of the child as far too young yet for a bride, but somehow, as she looked at her now, her thought seemed to change. 'Arlotte did not look too young to be loved, or to love either; nay, rather, one might almost think, but for her secluded life, she knew already what manner of thing love was. How strange it seems, thought Edmée. Does God put the seed of love into every woman's heart, so that it shall be ready to burst and blossom into flower when the true lover comes to gather and carry it off? And then she thought she would not like any lover to come and carry off her Arlotte. And then she suddenly changed her tune, as she had

changed her thought, breaking off from Beethoven's "Adelaide," and bursting into an old French troubadour's song, said to have been written by Charles d'Orléans when a prisoner in England. It was a quaint little song, and one that Arlotte liked well to sing. But it was Edmée who sang it now—Edmée, whose ringing, thrilling, pathetic voice her father had loved to listen to in the old days, but which had vibrated so seldom through the rooms of the old château since his death.

"Ah!" said Arlotte, with a little quivering sigh, as Edmée came to the end of the first verse. "How good it is—how beautiful!"

Edmée smiled again, and went on singing.

There were many verses to the song, but the spirit of the refrain was always the same. Those sung by Comtesse Edmée might, if translated, run thus:—

-
- “ To others, with their laughter,
And praise that cometh after,
Thy songs may gaily call ;
To me, so sad and lonely,
Oh ! sing for Love’s sake only,
Or else sing not at all.
- “ On others and their measure,
Of youth, and health, and pleasure,
Thy smile may gladly fall ;
On me, so sick and lonely,
Oh ! smile for Love’s sake only,
Or else smile not at all.
- “ For others’ gilded kisses,
And others’ bartered blisses,
Thy love may be in thrall ;
But me, so poor and lonely,
Oh ! love for Love’s sake only,
Or else love not at all !”

After those first few murmured words, Arlotte stood quite still, silently listening, with her head a little bent forward, her soft dark eyes dilated, and her rose-leaf lips folded together, as though some sweet, strange secret lay hidden behind them.

Some secret—yes—surely. A secret as sweet as a sugar-plum, and as strange as the bloom of a rare-tinted southern fruit, and fit for the mouth of a sixteen-year-old child. Only, alas! sugar-plums have bitter almonds inside them sometimes, and the southern fruit may be sour-tasted, for all its pretty painted rind, as Edmée knew very well, and as Arlotte knew not at all, as yet.

There were five long years stretching between these sisters, (it was a lifetime to one of them,) and they had been a good deal separated hitherto, playing at see-saw with convent life and education generally. But they were very much alike, notwithstanding. They had the same starry eyes and cloudy hair, the same pure-shaped faces, round of cheek and chin, straight and low of brow, a type of face as rare as beautiful, a sort of face all made of flowers, as Mrs. Browning has certainly said somewhere,

though, no doubt, in other and prettier words.

But there the likeness ended. For the rest, the one sister had looked on death face to face, and kissed love lip to lip; whereas the other had, as yet, scarce seen so much as a dead butterfly, nor known aught of love, save her convent school-friends' rough caresses. Also, to those who could see the soul behind the mask, Arlotte was pretty enough, very pretty, but Edmée was beautiful.

"Thou art late, *petite*," said the latter, ceasing her music at last, and speaking in the mildest possible tone of reproach. "Thou shouldst not stay out so late—all alone."

Comtesse Arlotte smiled, and the close-locked lips were cleft in twain by the lightning of a laugh, as the Italians say.

"I was not alone, *ma sœur*," she answered softly.

“Not alone? who was with thee, then, *chérie*?”

“Who?—who? guess, Edmée. *Mais non*, thou could’st not guess, for even to me it seems still too good to be true,” cried the girl, crossing her arms, and clasping her breast, as if hugging to herself for the last time her own delicious secret. “Who then but *ce beau Anglais*, who has been lodging at the ‘Lion d’Or,’ in the village, for some weeks past, and whom it seems thou, or at least *mon papa*, knew well in the days of old, but of whom I have never heard thee speak—who—who?” speaking very softly and slowly, as if to draw out the rapturous words to their furthest sweetest length. “*Qui donc sera t’il, sinon Monsieur le Colonel Murray?*”

“*Monsieur le Colonel Murray;*” the words fell flat upon Edmée’s ears. And yet they seemed to be echoing over and over from all corners of the room at once. It was

as if all the goblins and gurgoyles from the turrets outside, had come in to grin at her.

"Dost thou remember the name?" asked Arlotte, eager to talk now that her secret was disclosed.

Edmée smiled a little bitterly. Did she remember? Could she ever forget? Can a girl forget the love of her heart? But he—he, her once plighted lover—had he forgotten altogether?

"Yes—I remember," she answered, forcing her lips to speak. "Our father knew him very well once, but afterwards disliked him. He called at the château a short time ago. He is still here, then?" she added, growing confused, and feeling thankful for the friendly sheltering darkness.

"Not only still is, but always will be," laughed little Arlotte, as she danced across the now dusky room to the further corner in which, her sister and the piano

still kept company together. "He will be here always—for I am going to keep him here always—I am going to marry *ce beau* Colonel Murray."

Edmée had known what was coming before it came. She heard the words before they were spoken. Women always do in these cases, I think. The idea had barely entered into her head, the thought had not been born a second, and yet there it was fronting her, full-grown and armed—an avengeful Cupid with poisoned arrows.

It was like a short, sharp, sudden passing from life to death. The dead we fancy know all, the moment they are dead. The living, we fear, know nothing, however long they live.

Edmée was dead. The fair brown-haired woman with the music-making fingers, and the soft singing voice, was dead; smitten down with a word, as a bird by a shot. She had thought herself only half alive before, but now she knew

she was wholly dead. She did not moan, nor feel any particular pain. Her lips were frozen, her heart was like ice. She knew all. She felt nothing. She was dead.

She had one thought however—even the dead may have one regret—one remorse—perhaps even one desire. “Arlotte must never know,” she said to herself, “Arlotte must never know.” It seemed due to him—to her—above all to the child herself, that she should never turn over the pages of that sad old story.

One may live without love of man, she knew. One cannot live without faith in man, she thought.

Perhaps she was wrong. Perhaps here and there one may come across men and women who are leading, not grandly nor helpfully, indeed, but contentedly enough, a sort of vegetable life, without any special love or faith in them, beyond a root-like affection for surroundings, and

a belief in daily dewdrops, and showers in due course. Perhaps it would have been better had Arlotte known all, even if it had resulted in some such life as this for her. Perhaps it would have been better had Edmée told all, and not set herself to spare her—to spare him, for though she herself was dead, as she thought, her ghost was still faithful to the faithless, loyal to the disloyal.

Her hands went on playing a little. Hands are unsympathetic members, and have little to do with the head, less with the heart—which I hope may be taken, as one excuse for “strikes.”

Arlotte stood by, wondering a little, but not thinking very much about her sister ; for had she not so many other things to think about now ?

“Why dost thou not speak, Edmée ?” she cried at last. “Why dost thou not cease thy playing and wish me joy ? Such melancholy music as thou art making too !

Please stop now—on that chord—so.” And down went the little warm hands with a crash, and rested on her sister’s cold fingers, till the echo of the notes wailed sadly through the room, and died away at last in silence. “But ah! *mon Dieu*—how cold are thy fingers, *ma sœur*! One might as well shake hands with a ghost.”

Comtesse Edmée tried to smile—tried to speak; but she *was* a ghost, you know, so could do neither.

“One is always cold here, the house is so dull and dreary,” continued Arlotte, looking round with an amusing air of patronizing pity. “And we girls are as dull as the house. We never do anything or go anywhere. We never visit Paris because we are *Légitimistes*. We never have any company here, because we are *jeunes dames* living alone.” (There was another reason besides these two, which Arlotte did not know of, but which

Edmée did). "Oh ! it has been dull—very dull, but it will be so no longer. *Nous allons changer tout ça—nous autres, Charles et moi.*"

As the breath of the four winds upon the dry bones in the vision of Ezekiel, so it seemed was the sound of that name to the ghost of Edmée. She remembered the day when she too had first whispered it in sweet shy happiness ; she could never forget the fearful hour when she last shrieked it in despair. It all came back upon her now with a thrill and a rush that sent the hot blood careering and tingling through her veins. Bone seemed to join to bone, thought to thought. She was knit together once more. She shivered, she shook, she spoke.

"Have you then found it so dull, poor little Arlotte?" she said, gently. "And since when have you settled to alter it all you and—Charles?"

"Since one hour," replied the girl, rap-

turously, not noticing the slow grave tones in which her sister spoke. "Since one hour, Edmée. Thou wert still in here making thy music, and we could hear the sound of it as we stood out there over against the pink almond-trees. But I for one did not listen much, for Charles was talking then. And by-and-by, just when the sun went down, he took my hands in his—so—and looked at me—so—and then he told me that he loved me, and asked me to marry him—and I—well I—said yes, of course ; and that, I think, is all," added Arlotte, rather at a loss how further to explain this sudden attachment, which though born of flattery, and grown up apace through idleness, and ignorance, and ennui, was yet true love on her part, —at least love pure, if weak, because it was the first, frank, free offering of a young girl's heart.

"But why did Colonel Murray meet you there, hiding himself like a thief behind

the pink almond trees, instead of coming up to the château with his heart in his hand for you to take, *mon enfant?*” asked Edmée, still speaking gravely, and feeling that she must know all in order that Arlotte should know nothing.

“Dost thou not know, Edmée? I thought thou didst?” returned the girl, surprised. “*Ecoutez donc.* He has told me everything.” (Edmée started, but Arlotte went on quite calmly.) “Once, long ago, whilst I was still at the convent, and thou—I forget where thou wert—perhaps away in the north with our aunt, Colonel Murray was *grand ami avec mon papa*, and often and much here at the château. For a whole winter this was so. At last, in the spring, *un beau jour*, *mon papa* hears that his friend is *Républicain*—that he has fought for the Poles, the Hungarians—*que sais-je—moi enfin* for anyone or any country where liberty is needed and kings are not. *Voilà, mon papa qui*

est furieux, mon Charles qui est chassé. There was no *explication*, no *scène*. It was a political difference, *voilà tout*. But he has a high spirit, *mon Charles*. He could not brook being loved to-day and hated to-morrow. He left the *château*, *bien entendu*, he could not stay to be insulted. But as he went away he vowed he would return some day, and re-enter the *château* as a welcome and an honoured guest. I am going to give him the right to do that, Edmée—I am going to atone for my father's strange conduct—I am going to help *mon Charles* to fulfil his vow."

This was the story, then ; the story that Arlotte had been told, and that Edmée must act before her day after day. Her heart sank within her, but she took up her part at once. There was something so confident, so triumphant in her young sister's smiles and words, that she could not have starved or slurred with a word that crystal shield of innocence and trust.

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CHAPTER II.

DUETTO.

"We wait till the heavens above us,
The flowering earth, or the seas
Shall bring us the soul meant to love us,
And hours much sweeter than these."

ARTHUR O'SHAUGHNESSY.



COLONEL MURRAY stood beside the pink almond trees whilst Arlotte de Coulanges, his betrothed bride, tripped away over the grass and the gravel, and finally disappeared behind a side-door under one of the old grey turrets of the château.

He was a handsome man, with a pale dark face and deep set eyes, and a nose

fashioned after a well-known ducal model, and a fine aristocratic air generally. But he did not look like a happy man, nor a successful one, though his wooing has prospered to-day, and the future must of a surety seem fair enough in his eyes. For Arlotte was not only pretty, but wealthy also, and Colonel Murray was not superior to either charm.

The sun had set, the shifting shadows were still at last. The grass grew damp, the air grew chill, the feathery wind-blown leaves stood out sharp and distant against the clear topaz-tinted sky, the wet spring blossoms dripped and dropped all over and about him. But Colonel Murray stood there, still leaning against the little frail almond tree, and gazing at the old grey château, with its frowning battlements, and grim turrets and towers, for which many a *loyau gentilhomme* had fought in the old hard days, and behind which many a *noble daymoyselle* had lived

and loved, and been wooed and won. For the De Coulanges had always been famous for beauty, and their last descendants had not broken the good rule. The only question now was about the loyal gentleman.

The birds were carolling through still chill air, bursting their little throats with their evening hymn. The cows in the field behind were supping off the short, crisp grass, and lowing sleepy good-nights to each other. The dog in the stables yonder was baying at a baby-moon, who seemed frightened at the noise, and inclined to hide its face in the breast of a friendly cloud. The servants in the kitchen were clattering and chattering over their pots and pans, and calling to each other in high treble voices, and singing shrilly over their work, as French servants always do ; but Colonel Murray heard none of these things.

He stood so still, that a little foolish

bird, born perhaps that spring, mistook him for some strange new shaped tree, and hopped about on the grass at his feet, and looked up at him curiously with bright black eyes, and smooth brown head quaintly perked on one side; and meditated, no doubt, upon building her nest in his breast when her time for nests should come. But Colonel Murray never saw the bird. What he *did* see was a bell-shaped face, with a cloud of dusky hair floating round it, and a pair of soft dark eyes, which yet shone like stars, and a mouth, curved and curling, like a crumpled rose-leaf, which had once been his to kiss; but which now he had put away from him for ever.

What he *did* hear was the sound of a song, drifting out from the open windows of the château, and over the damp grass, and through the blossoming branches of the trees, and on till it fell upon his ears, as he stood there under the pink

almond-tree ; and brought in its track a whole host of winged memories, as music always has a knack of doing.

It brought back to him a faint memory of his baby-life, which had been happy and bright, and full of music and flowers, as most children's are, or at least seem to have been in after years. And then his boy-life among his brothers, when the music grew rougher, and the flowers of no use unless they grew into fruit ; when his eldest brother, the coward, used to talk in a quavering treble voice, and turn pale at the notion of a fight ; and his second brother, the sneak, used to pipe away in a feeble falsetto, and tell innumerable tales upside down ; and he himself, the third, the scamp, used to tumble into every possible scrape, from which he would emerge somehow, black from head to foot, and covered with mire and mud.

It brought back to him his young life

in the — Guards, when his eldest brother, Lord MacCraven, had become the Earl of Macpheintart; and his second brother, the Honourable Thomas, the rector of a fine fat family living; but he himself was the scamp still, spending his money like a prince, drinking like a lord, and laughing when they told him ruin was staring in his face.

It brought back to him how that unpleasant visage left off simply staring at last, and seized him with a grip, and bound him hand and foot; how the Earl was afraid to help him once, lest he should be asked to do so twice; how the Rector shook his head, and pointed to his church; and how at last, a debtor and an outcast, he turned his back on his native land for ever, as he thought; and on his creditors too, he hoped.

It brought back to him one wild winter spent among Polish snows, and Polish patriots—a winter full of wild adventures,

and hair-breadth escapes, and desperate deeds done in vain ; and then the summer that followed, a sunshiny summer in a sunshiny land, where hour after hour was spent in gathering up gold in gilded saloons, whilst beautiful women, with laughing voices went floating by, and the smell of flowers, and the strains of music were wafted in from the warm sweet air outside.

It brought back to him the vision of a fair young face, seen through the dim, clouded window of a travelling *calèche*, drawn up in a wayside village, beyond the town of Arles, where he was resting on his way to Monaco ; of a noble old head seen beyond ; of serving the travellers in some slight way or other, rescuing a pet dog, or pulling down a blind, perhaps—of the girl's gentle thanks, and the old man's offers of hospitality—of his first sight of Edmée de Coulanges, as she returned with her father one golden autumn

day, from their annual visit of homage to the Exile of Frohsdorf.

He was a scamp, you know, forgotten by his country, forsaken by his friends, and yet, here was one more chance of salvation offered to him. He loved Edmée from the first moment he saw her.

He had known many beautiful women in his day—women of England, haughty and cold—women of other lands, all fire and flame, with their sham passions and pretentious manners, and meretricious beauty; but he had never seen anyone before like this high-born, high-bred French girl, with her pure, unconscious, flower-like sweetness and grace—this Rose of Provence, whom to look at was, alas! to long to pluck and wear.

Count Armand de Coulanges received Colonel Murray most cordially. He was of a cheerful, hospitable nature, though he had somewhat slipped out of society in his old age. There were so few folks

left in the world whose views chimed with his, he would say, when pressed upon this point, and a De Coulanges could not associate with a *canaille* steepened in infidelity and new-fangled ideas of all sorts. Better, far better, isolation. But there was another reason also, which was less presentable, perhaps.

The Count had "a cause" to support, and "a cause" is an expensive luxury. M. le Comte de Coulanges found it so. The cornfields and vineyards were ground down and pressed into silver and gold, which was sent scudding over land and sea, into mysterious corners of mysterious towns, into little back streets of London, where old historic names were hanging up over barbers' signs, and proud Bourbonists were teaching tradesmen's daughters their *parlez-vous* at the exorbitant rate of half-a-crown an hour. And still more was asked for, and was scraped together and sent somehow.

He could not help it, *ce cher Comte Armand*, as he was affectionately apostrophized in those back alleys and mysterious corners. His whole heart and soul were in the good work. What were a few sacrifices in the interests of such "a cause?" What, indeed, but an honour and a privilege. Not that Count Armand's sacrifices were made at the expense of others, as some folks' are. He did not rob his heirs to pay his contemporaries. His two daughters were amply provided for by the terms of their mother's settlement, (they were said to be great heiresses, but that was not true,) the rest of the property he might dispose of as he pleased. But he robbed himself of a good deal of pleasure by denying himself to all society, and by refusing to hold intercourse with any except loyal and staunch supporters of His Majesty *Henri Cinq*.

With Colonel Murray, however, it was

different. He was not a French subject, and his name, moreover, was a passport. The faithful old Royalist had once been in England with his august master, and had there made the acquaintance of Lord Macpheintart, the father of the present Colonel Charles, who was then a little blue-eyed boy, in a kilted tartan petticoat. His most gracious Majesty had deigned to express approbation of the said nobleman, and instantly the whole clan of Murray became sacred in the eyes of the Lord of Coulanges. It was a lucky chance their falling in with the son of that estimable *milor* when their *calèche* broke down that autumn day in the village beyond Arles. He must come to Coulanges—no, he, Count Armand, would take no refusal—he must be fêted, made much of; the son of the man whom His Majesty had praised must learn how faithful French subjects delight to honour their sovereign's word.

Colonel Murray's refusal had been of the faintest kind. He was in search of adventure; he had no settled plans. The old man had given him a cordial invitation; his daughter had seconded it by her eyes, if not by her lips. After a momentary hesitation he accepted it, nothing loth.

Count Armand enjoyed Colonel Murray's company greatly. He had cut himself off from society of late, but he had not lost his taste for it. They talked together frankly, the younger man especially so. He told the old man the whole story of his life, the manner in which his brothers had treated him, the miserable minuteness of his younger son's pittance. He omitted nothing, not his reckless life in the Guards, nor his debts, nor the number of his creditors, not even his gambling propensities; nothing, indeed, except those few wild months he had spent among the snows and wolves in Poland.

Why he omitted this little fact he scarcely allowed even to himself. He had a motive for detailing the rest; had he no motive for concealing this? Did he think the adventures of those few wild months hardly worth remembering and relating? or did he know that of all his offences, and they were neither few nor small, this alone, to the old Legitimist, would be the unpardonable sin?

Count Armand listened to the young man's talk most kindly and sympathetically. He had his motive too. He was already an old man, full of years and increasing infirmities, and he leant on Edmée as on a staff; but he knew he could not do so always. He knew that "young girls must marry." Already she was past the age at which many French *jeune dames* have homes and husbands of their own to rule over; already she might have married a page of honour at the Court of Frohsdorf, or the son of an

exiled Duke, who was giving dancing-lessons in London, but that neither of these *prétendants* had seemed good in her eyes, nor in her father's either, for that matter. What if at the end a Bonapartist eagle should swoop down upon his gentle dove? or what if one fine morning an Orleanist cock should crow over the light of his eyes? or worse still, a red-capped Republican stain with bloody fingers the lily-white hand of his Bourbonist maiden? *Grâce!* the very idea of such a thing occurring now made him creep—the mere chance of its happening after his death would make him turn in his grave!

But here was a way of preventing such a fate. Here was a young man well-born, well-bred, of a family, indeed, concerning which His Majesty had spoken highly, a man to whom French politics had been nothing in the past, but who was willing to embrace those of the Count in the future, and who would

gladly consent to live at De Coulanges, and thereby make Edmée a wife without her ceasing to be a daughter; it was a heaven-made husband, heaven-born, heaven-sent, and what could the old man do but fall down on his knees and thank God for the gift.

And Edmée?

Edmée's father was growing old and more *one-ideal* than ever, but, even he would hardly have proposed Colonel Murray as a husband to his daughter had he not seen how the girl's whole existence seemed suddenly to beat in unison with that of the Englishman, and how her very beauty had deepened, become suffused, as it were, with light and happiness, during the young fellow's residence at Coulanges. It had been merely a girl's beauty before, pure as a lily, and fresh as morning-dew; it was as an angel's now. Was there yet a third state into which she must pass?


Or do some women go through life with no other experiences save those of love and happiness, and win a saint's crown in heaven without having worn a martyr's palm on earth? I scarcely think so. It would not be fair.

Edmée certainly had no experience of any sort. She was as ignorant of the world as Arlotte in later days. She had seen so few folks, it was natural she should fall in love with this adventurous Englishman, you think. She thought so too, once; but she laughed, as the thought faded away from her mind. If she had had the whole world to choose from, it would have made no difference. She loved him; and what can one do more, or better, than love?

As for Colonel Murray, it was all pleasant and smooth enough for him. The connection was a good one. The wealth of the De Coulanges was known far and wide. His brothers heard rumours of

his engagement, and wrote gratulatorily ; and his creditors grew patient, and ceased their clamours for a time. Edmée was more beautiful, more loving, more perfect, day by day ; but above all, he loved her—loved her with that full and rarely stirred tide of passion which overpowers such men as he but once in their lives.

There was no one to object to the proposed marriage. In fact, there were no objections to be made—not even on the score of religion, Colonel Murray having announced himself from the first to be a Roman Catholic. Half the Murray family, the best half, of course, had always belonged to the ancient and true faith. That was well known. How fortunate that Charles should have followed the pious traditions of the elder branch of his family ! The Abbé Méroigne, a dreamy, gentle-eyed old man, with gold-rimmed spectacles and a snuff-box, declared himself to be well satisfied. He had seen some letters which



had passed between Colonel Murray and his cousin, Father Philip of the Oratory. He pronounced them to be instinct with good feeling and piety.

There was one person, however, who was *not* quite so well satisfied on this matter as was the Abbe Méroigne. This was Josette Jozeau, waiting-maid to Comtesse Edmée, a handsome young woman with a fine strong will of her own, and even some sort of genius about her, but with only two feelings of affection in her composition. One of these was lavished upon Comtesse Edmée. The other had long since been bestowed upon a certain young fellow in the neighbouring village of Belle-Fontaine.

This young fellow, who was steady and well-thought of, had been for some years servant to the Protestant *pasteur* in that village. Suddenly he threw up his situation, went off to sea, and was heard of no more.

There was a great deal of talk about this of course. But there was less, perhaps, than might have been expected, for several other strange things were happening just then, and even villagers' capacities for gossip are limited. Another disappearance had occurred from the house of the *pasteur*, which excited far more attention than that of Pierrot, the servant. This was the sudden and prolonged absence of a young German lad, Herman von Reichanau, who had been living for some months past with the *pasteur* of Belle-Fontaine for the purpose of learning French. He was the eldest son of a wealthy and noble family, and a great fuss was naturally made about *his* disappearance.

The people round were sympathetic; Colonel Murray, who had become acquainted with the boy during his residence at the "Lion d'Or," in the village of Coulanges, was untiring in his investigations, and worked away at the matter with all

the ardour of an Englishman. But no trace of the boy was discovered.

He was a weak-minded young fellow, so at least the villagers used to say, and not over generous with his money, though he seemed to have plenty of it. 'Latterly too he had become addicted to drinking, and to worse things perhaps, also, for he would be seen reeling out of the "Lion d'Or" with his pockets turned inside out, and his thick uncouth German voice rolling out the words, "Ruined! ruined!"

These may have been idle tales, however, for the boy was not popular among the villagers, who perhaps even then cherished an instinctive hatred to Teutons, and who soon settled among themselves that he had come to an untimely end somehow. And then, as they had the delightful topic of the *fiançailles* and approaching marriage of the young lady at the château to jabber about over their washtubs and their cabbage soup, they

put the thought of this *mauvais sujet* out of their heads altogether, just as they had already forgotten *l'affaire* of Josette's young sailor.

With Josette, however, it was different. It is hard to have to lose a hand, or an eye, and to the sailor's deserted maiden, this lopping-off of her object of affection was like losing one of those members. Nothing could replace it. This was the real thing, she would say pathetically, anything else would be but a sham. Now and then some jaunty *garçon* at the "Lion d'Or," or some *jeune fermier* from one of the villages round would humbly bow their knees before Mademoiselle Josette. But she would send them to the right-about fast enough. She did not give away what belonged to her Pierrot. She did not know how it was with him, nor where he was, but she did not believe him to be in the land of the dead. He might return any day and claim his own. She

must needs save all she could of love for him—all indeed that was not already bestowed upon Comtesse Edmée.

And so it chanced, that even for little Comtesse Arlotte, Josette the maid had no particular affection, except in so far as the younger sister belonged to the elder. “*La petite* was a beautiful butterfly,” she would say, just as her would-be adorers were, to her, as teasing gnats. But neither the one nor the other was for Josette Jozeau. She was born to stand alone. She was destined to *coiffer Sainte Catherine*. She was not to be molested, nor lightly spoken of in her presence. These were the resolutions passed upon her by the servant’s parliament. She was desirous of reducing her mistress to the same old-maidish condition in which she existed herself, these law-givers added one day, observing the black look she bestowed upon the young Comtesse’s lover. To all of which Josette was silent. She

had no love to spare, but it was evident she was not equally destitute of its antithesis, nor at all stinting in its use.

She was forced to be silent, however. She dared not speak in her "lady's chamber;" she would not speak in the kitchen. But though she did not utter a word, she sighed very often, and gazed long and wistfully into her mistress's bright happy face.

But Comtesse Edmée took no notice. She was fond of her waiting-maid, who had been for a short time her mother's also. She trusted implicitly to her taste in millinery and even in confectionary. But in the matter of choosing a husband, she preferred exercising her own judgment. And who indeed should say she was not right?

And yet, perhaps, even in *this* matter Josette, the maid, might have had better means of judging than her mistress. In the first place, *her* eyes were not blinded,

nor her ears stopped by love. Secondly, her sister, who was cook-maid at the "Lion d'Or," was neither deaf nor dumb; and thirdly, her mother, who lived in the village of Belle-Fontaine, was well-to-do, much respected, of a sociable turn of mind, given to gossip, and the croniest of all the cronies.

Neither Count Armand nor his daughter were unaware that certain stories, not altogether of a creditable nature, were circulated in the village concerning the Englishman who was about to be connected with their family. It seemed to them that villages were always sinks of gossip, or rather that such a place as Coulanges must be a very *paradis des bavards*. There was no sort of skilled work done in it, only the ordinary agricultural labour, and what else had the peasants to do but talk, and talk, as they delved and spun, (I wonder whether Adam and Eve gossiped about the loves of the beasts in the

garden of Eden?) using their tongues just as they used their hands. So, at least thought Count Armand and Comtesse Edmée. And in truth, all over the world, what is there sweeter to a peasant's tongue than picking a prince to pieces?

So it came to pass on a windy March day, when the sun was shining, and the birds were singing, and the flowers budding and blowing, and all things round seemed full of sweet young love, and strange new life, Charles Fitz-Roy Fitz-Alan Murray, and Marie Edmée Valentine de Coulanges, were betrothed.

For three days, Life was Love—Love was Life—Love was enough.

On the fourth day, a cloud gathered—a storm broke. The birds' nests were blown down, the flower-heads were broken, love was torn asunder from love by the blast of evil tidings, and the fury of an old man's wrath.

How the news came, Colonel Murray never knew. Perhaps Josette did. But it did not matter, for they were true. It was true he had fought for the Poles—for liberty—for patriots—for rebels—for whatever the Count in his fury chose to call them. It was true that his principles had been republican—true, that he had cast in his lot with that party—true, that he had served them with his sword, and his purse. It was all true.

And then the Count, who had overlooked so much, became inexorable. He stormed, he raged, he was carried out of himself. *He*—to have for a son-in-law a man who could hire himself out to fight for revolutions in every country in Europe; *he*—to give his daughter to a man of no politics, no faith, no religion; *he*, Count Armand de Coulanges, the most loyal subject of the last of the Bourbons, and the chief supporter of the Right Divine—never—never—never.

Colonel Murray's face grew grey, but he answered no word. He wound his arms round the weeping, frightened Edmée, he strained her to his heart, he bade her a fierce farewell. Then he put her away from him abruptly—reeled to the door like a drunken man, and stood there for a moment glaring at them, and swearing that he would have his revenge some day, and re-enter the château once more, if not by right, then by might.

The girl winced and whitened, and shook before his words, like a leaf in a storm.

“Oh stop, Charles!” she cried. “Oh don't say that, Charles, *mon ami*.” And then she gasped for breath, and stretched out her hands feebly, as though she thought thereby to stem the torrent of burning words that were raining down like hailstones from her lover's lips on her father's head.

He caught her hands in his. He was beside himself with rage and passion.

"You too," he said bitterly, looking at her; "you turn against me too, oh, Edmée," he cried, tearing from her finger the ring he himself had placed on it only three days before. And then, he flung her from him once more, and fled away down the old oak stairs, and through the budding chestnut woods, and so out into the open country beyond. And wherever he went, that cry, "Oh, Charles, Charles!" went with him too, ringing in his ears for ever.

It was four years to-night, as he stood beside the pink almond trees, since that night when he was banished from the Château de Coulanges. And in those four years many things had happened to both of them.

In those four years Edmée had known suffering and sickness, and looked upon

death; but had never seen sign of her absent love, nor heard whether he were alive or dead, faithful or faithless.

Was it any wonder then, that weary with waiting, and sick at heart with "hope deferred," she should give in at last, and utter the promise her father had been craving so long, and which he now demanded with his dying breath?

"*Ma fille*," he said, feebly, groping for her hand, and closing his own over it, "thou hast had much to try thee, but thou art strong yet. Promise me, now, before I go hence and be no more seen, that thou wilt never wed that evil-disposed Englishman, to whom thou wert once betrothed—never, if thou can'st help it, see him, or speak with him, or admit him within these gates again. So shall I sing my *nunc dimittis*."

Then Edmée, stooping down, till her warm breath fanned his cold cheeks, and her trembling lips touched his pale damp

brow, murmured in a low clear voice, for she too had known the old song in the old days:

“Mon père, je te le promets, jamais, oh jamais plus.”

Colonel Murray was at Baden-Baden pursuing his old trade, when the news of the death of Count Armand de Coulanges reached him.

He let a few months go by—the months of mourning. Then, whilst the year was still young, he went back to the château, full of resolution, but vague of purpose.

He went up the well-remembered chestnut avenues, and along the garden-path. He rang at the great gates, and sent in his name, and waited.

The Comtesse Edmée was sitting alone when the name was brought to her. She was startled, of course, but she was somehow prepared for this, too. She had felt when she gave that promise,

that its strength would be tested some day. She refused to see him.

He tried again and again the next day, but always with the same result. He even tried to bribe Josette, the maid, to admit him privily to her lady's presence. But the faithful waiting-woman turned from him with loathing and disgust.

He felt if he only could see her for one moment, face to face, his wishes must triumph. Perhaps Edmée felt the same. She dared not trust herself to see him again. She even gave up her usual walks and drives, lest she should meet him unawares. Hence it was that Arlotte had wandered about by herself so much of late, whilst Edmée had waited for her at home.

Gradually, and by slow degrees, for a woman's persistency is not flattering to a man's self-love, and is generally called by him obstinacy, Colonel Murray began to discover that there was no hope for him.

One day, as he turned away from the closed doors, someone threw open a casement window, and looked down at him wonderingly. He, hearing the sound, looked up, and saw a girl standing behind a creeper-hung window, her face peeping out like a white flower, through the cloud of clematis and ivy. It was a pretty young face, like Edmée's, yet not hers. A face less sweet, less tender, less thoughtful than hers had even been; but yet a face foolish enough to love, fair enough to woo.

As he looked up and saw her standing there, half in the sunshine, half in the shadow, half child, half woman, a cruel thought crept into his heart and took root there. He turned away from the château, and swore once more he would take that which his hands coveted, even though he sold his soul by doing so.

He was a desperate man, ruined, deserted, and that which might have saved

him even now, had turned against him for ever. But the world was not worn out for him yet, and if he might not have love, he would at least have life,—"a soft life full of pleasurable ways."

In those past four years he had played high, and lost more than he had won. His brothers had grown incredulous concerning his reported marriage, his creditors rampant. Whatever he did he must do quickly.

He had done it to-night.

He had done it as he stood over there beside the pink almond-trees, while the music came floating out over the flowers, and a young girl's hands were caught in his, and a young girl's face was uplifted, and looking at him and wondering. It was a fair young bride he had won; it was half the corn-fields and vineyards, the woods and rivers around; it was a safe future, an assured fortune, and yet the voice in his ears was not Arlotte's happy

little whispering "yes," but Edmée's despairing shriek, "Oh, Charles, Charles, *mon ami!*" the words on his lips were not murmurs of happiness, or blessings on his bride, but deep-drawn curses for himself, and a cry that echoed back the other, "Oh, Edmée! Edmée, my lost love!"

And then suddenly, as you know, the song ceased—dying into silence, as a star disappears into space—as light goes out into darkness—as joy is turned into pain—as hope is lost in despair—as love never ends—never dies, alas! but goes on gnawing for ever.





CHAPTER III.

TRIO.

" Hope, memory, love.
Hope for fair morn, and love for day,
And memory for evening grey
And solitary dove."

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.



WILL you vow to be safe from
the headache on Tuesday, and
think it will hold ?

No—not you.

But you will promise never to wed
that man, always to love that woman,
and fondly imagine that you will never
have a headache or a heartache about
them (or at least, never show it, if you
have one) all the days of your life.

Stop! there's the point. A headache is difficult to hide, one's cheeks grow so pale, one's eyes so dull and heavy. But a heartache—*pouf*, anyone can hide a heartache! It only needs a little more laughter than usual, a gayer song, a wittier word, a fonder face than one's wont, and the thing is done.

There were a bleeding heart and an aching head in the fair domain of Coulanges in those days; but no one knew anything about them except their owner, so the vow and the promise, the ache and the pain, were well kept, and well hidden.

Arlotte guessed nothing. To some people love is as spectacles, through which they see better and further than ever they have done in their lives before. To others it acts like blinkers, whereby they can only see that which lies immediately before themselves. Arlotte's case was the latter one. She was a

mere child still, and her whole soul was absorbed by love. It was not a very big one, and there was not much room in it for other thoughts. When one is basking in the full blaze, and haze, of summer sunshine, how should one think of the eternal snow-hills, nigh at hand though they may chance to be?

And so the sisters changed places in life, as people often do, like partners in a quadrille, and the two who had tripped the same measure together previously, made no sign.

It was true they never met, never touched each other's hands or crossed each other's paths in that dance of life. Had it been otherwise, could Edmée have kept her own secret or his honour? There was some good in that promise made to the dead after all.

It was his honour she was most anxious to keep sacred. He had betrayed her, but that was her fault as much, if not more,

than his. She knew nothing of his life, and she had seen too little of men to be able to guess at his nature. She only knew she had loved him once—loved him still, alas! though she tried to think she did not.

The sisters were, as Arlotte had said, “*jeunes dames*, living alone;” and the elder cared as little as the younger *pour la politique* which had been the cause of the quarrel between Colonel Murray and her father. She knew he had suffered. She felt as though she had sinned against him in that matter of the promise; and now that Arlotte was going to atone for it, should she not be content? Provided that the beloved one were blessed still, if not by her means, then by another’s, what signified the rest?

It was not for a long time that she could bring herself to look at things in this light. But she meant to try and do so. She meant to light this candle when-

ever she wanted to read that story of hers. It was a false light, and she was reading her story upside down, as so many of us do, but there was something sublime and heroic about it too. Only, alas! heroism does not seem to be of much use now-a-days, nor love either, for that matter!

And so the dance went on between these two (and there was no tripping or stumbling), till it ended at last as such dances should do, in a peal of marriage-bells and a dazzle of summer sunshine, and Charles Murray took Arlotte de Coulanges to be his wedded wife, and the music changed its measure and another dance had begun.

Then, and not till then, Colonel Murray re-entered the château, and found himself once more within the well-remembered hall, with its tapestry hangings and carved oakwork. Then, and not till then, he stood before Edmée, and touched her cold hands, and looked into her pale face,

and found it, even in that moment, fairer to him than the young undimmed beauty by his side. For Arlotte was there, struggling with the floating end of her veil, which had become entangled with a stray sheet of tapestry that was hanging loosely from the wall. She had dropped her handkerchief too, and half her flowers as well, for she was one of those unlucky people who always come to pieces somehow, and have a knack of shedding their feathers wherever they go. The consequence was, that she was too much engrossed with her own unhappy condition to have any attention to spare for the meeting and greeting taking place between her husband and sister; nor did she notice how grey and ashen grew the face of one, how faint and tremulous the words of the other.

“Unloose me,” she said, a little petulantly. “Oh! what a dust!” and then she let fall her missal-book as well, and

the clasp flew open, and the binding burst, and all the leaves and little pictures of angels and saints went flying and scampering away through the dust. "Is that an ill omen, Edmée?"

"It is an omen that the château does not want to lose you, *petite*," said Edmée, clasping the child-wife in her arms, and burying her face in her shoulder, as if glad of that friendly shelter. "And never mind about the little missal-book; you shall have mine."

Colonel Murray carried off his wife to England immediately after their marriage. His brothers had smiled upon him again, and invited them to their houses. He paid his visits, but not his creditors. Paying bills of such long standing seemed to him a grievous waste of money, and as the people had waited so long, they might as well wait a little longer. He could not quite tell the state of affairs yet, but he had already discovered to his dismay that

Arlotte's fortune was by no means so large as he had imagined it to be. All the monies the old Count could dispose of were vested in various funds for the relief of those noble exiles before alluded to. His daughters were possessed of ample fortunes, on which with prudence they could live luxuriously, though not exactly in the manner Colonel Murray had pictured to himself. And prudence, alas! even of the faintest, feeblest description, was not one of little Mrs. Murray's virtues.

She *must* have bonnets like those worn by her sister-in-law, the Countess of Macpheintart, and a horse to ride in the morning, and a opera-box at night. She would like to establish a school and almshouse, like those set going by Mrs. Thomas Murray, the Rector of Tattleton's wife. She wanted to buy a basket-carriage for the ancient nurse of the family, who told her apocryphal tales of the exceeding

beauty of the Honourable Charles in his early infancy, and who was rather better off, in many ways, than the Honourable Charles' wife herself. She ordered velvets and furs, and silks and laces; dress-makers in broughams visited her, milliners with liveried pages carrying neat boxes called upon her; and would not *ce cher* Charles buy her that set of sapphires she had seen in Emmanuel's shop—it would go so well with her blue velvet dress, trimmed with point d'Alençon?

There was no end to her wishes, and as they had always been gratified hitherto, having consisted chiefly of a desire for a stick of *sucre de pomme* from Belle-Fontaine, or a new ribbon for her poodle, she pouted and pined when told her wishes were impossible now. I suppose the first conjugal quarrel is always more or less nearly connected with "clothes," and I make no doubt Eve would have shed bitter tears in the garden of Eden had Adam

ventured to stint her in the quantity or quality of her fig-leaves.

Colonel Murray, however, had no scruples about venturing, but spoke to his wife sharply enough, as men always do when they have done a foolish thing, and feel that some one ought to be blamed for it. Poor little Arlotte was frightened. No one had ever spoken to her thus before. She never thought anyone could or would do so. She cried, and sobbed, and went down on her knees, and prayed Charles to sell her dresses and diamonds; finally she made herself ill, and then there was the doctor's bill to pay. Colonel Murray took her diamonds, but not her dresses. Something must be done, but what he knew not. He was at his wits' end, which was not to be wondered at, seeing he had been living on them so long. He was growing reckless and restless once more.

When Arlotte grew a little better, she

wanted to go back to Coulanges and Edmée; but this Colonel Murray would not hear of. "There would be parties to give, and parties to go to, and the devil's own bill to pay," he said roughly, and then he proposed Baden-Baden. The waters would do Arlotte good, he said. The poor little wife trembled at his words. "She would go anywhere he liked," she answered meekly. "Anywhere that was cheap." Her poor little spirit was broken.

And so one sunny day, before they had been married a year, and while the spring was still young, the flowers were just beginning to peep out like stars athwart the shadows of the Black Forest, and visitors were beginning to fill the hotels, and the gilded saloons, and the music garden, Colonel Murray and his wife found themselves running smoothly along the horse-railway from Oos, skimming past the cottages, and through the fields of maize, and

landed at last at Baden-Baden. And there they remained some time, for the sake of "cheapness," as Arlotte had said; and for something else besides.

All that winter and early spring, Comtesse Edmée had lived at Coulanges alone.

She had constant letters from Arlotte, on which she lived, I think—letters which told her that the child-wife was well and happy, that her husband was kind to her, that she liked England very much—would like it perfectly, in fact, if only Edmée was with her there. And with these letters the tender sister was content.

By-and-by they became shorter, and the spaces between them longer. Arlotte had been ill. Her husband's relations were not so kind to her as they might have been. They were cold, like their climate. She would never get well in England, and longed, oh! how ardently, to return to the château, and so on, and

so on. They were dreary little letters, abrupt and sad, but Edmée, being slow to think evil, still forced herself to be content. And so the long black winter days rolled away, and the birds began to twitter, and the trees began to bud, for the spring-tide was at hand once more.

Comtesse Edmée had a dream one night—a horrible, hateful dream that haunted her soul ever after.

This was her dream.

She dreamt that close upon her bedtime, one wet, windy night, when the world seemed to be wearing itself out in a passion of tears, and all the demons of the air were howling and gnashing their teeth as they went sweeping and swirling round and round the walls of the old château; that she was sitting in the little down-stairs *salon*, where the windows run down to the ground, and the *jalousies* are easily opened from the outside, sitting alone with a book across

her lap, and her hands closed over it, and her thoughts travelling far away back into the unchangeable past, or into the uncertain future—anywhere, out of the present—when suddenly a window behind her burst open and a gust of wet wind filled the room, and all the demons came rushing in, and a man as well, who clasped her in his arms and spoke to her wildly, and said that he was mad—ruined—lost for ever—set upon suicide, bent upon crime, from which she, and she alone, could save him.

In the name of her once living love, he kissed her, by the power of his undying passion he pleaded ; and the face that met hers was the face, and the voice that spoke was the voice, of Colonel Charles Murray.

She dreamt that she loosened herself from his arms and pushed him away a little, till he sank upon his knees before her, and she looked down upon him piti-

fully, as a departed spirit might look upon one it has loved, and lost, and left for ever. She dreamt that she bade him rest awhile, and fetched him food and wine with her own hands, lest the household should be startled, and the servants scared. She dreamt that she got together all the money she could, and brought it to him, and promised him more soon, at once, to-morrow. And then, speaking for the first time of his poor young wife, she opened one of the long low windows and let him out into the starless, shadowless, weeping night, and bade him "begone" in the name of Arlotte.

And after that dream, it seemed to Edmée that she lay awake, tossing and trembling all the rest of the night.

In the morning, Josette, the maid, told her mistress that the servants had heard strange sounds at midnight, as of voices talking together, and doors shutting, and windows opening, and that Baptiste coming

in at daybreak with his milk-pails, had found a handkerchief lying on the grass under the windows of the little *salon*.

The handkerchief was marked "C. M." Comtesse Edmée saw it at once. Josette must have seen it too.

"She must never know, Josette," cried Edmée, wildly. The dream and the sleepless night had made her feel so faint and foolish, she scarcely knew what she was saying. "She must never know, you understand. It would kill her."

It went near to killing Comtesse Edmée, nearer indeed than her faithful waiting-maid had any idea. For the rest, she understood well enough. She understood that Comtesse Edmée was a saint on earth; but that she had known a long time. She understood that Colonel Murray was a fiend in man's shape, but she had known that too. As for Comtesse Arlotte, it was sad for her, of course, poor little butterfly, but she was vain and

foolish, and had not much heart, and no perception at all, or she would have read her sister's story even in the midst of her own happiness; so she would probably feel nothing now, and was in truth not worth the trouble she was giving. So, at least, thought Comtesse Edmée's waiting-maid, who, like all her kind, saw much, but unlike them, said little.

All that day a thought which had come to her during the night tarried and abode with Comtesse Edmée. It was no new thought, it was indeed a thought that had been born in her during that past lonely winter, and that had lived with her many a weary day then. But then, *then* she had put it away from her—then she had refused to let it take shape or form—then she had said, “I may be dead, indeed I *am* dead to the world, but I will not be buried in a convent. I am not worthy of such a vocation. Such things are for holier, stronger women than I am. For me, oh!

for me, let there be another kind of life, lonely indeed, but brightened by the presence of those I love."

So she had prayed in the old days, struggling, and striving, and wrestling against her fate, and thinking, as we all do, that she might choose her way of life and hold to it.

But now—now, when her life seemed all at once to have become an accursed thing to those she loved best—now, when her very body was, as it were, cumbering the earth, and she only longed to get rid of herself—the prayer died away on her lips, and the old thought ran back into the old words: "I will go to my mother's country in the North, and join my aunt there; I will stay for a time, at least, with the Holy Sisters of Notre Dame de Bon Secours."

She felt she could not trust herself to see Arlotte, or Arlotte's husband again. Brave and careful as she had been

hitherto, the strain would be too great now. She understood Charles Murray at last. A word, a look; a sign, even, might betray him and all his ghastly falseness to the unsuspecting eyes of his innocent young wife. Together they might live happily enough, such things had been before, and Arlotte's little heart needed but a drop of love to be content; but with her standing beside them it would be different. Unwillingly she might absorb that drop of love, might divert it from its rightful channel.

No, it was best so. It was well there were such refuges for broken hearts and useless lives. She would prepare herself for her profession. A nun's life was a beautiful life, and once within the convent walls she would find peace. She would find work too, she hoped, which was a better thing, she knew. There would be the poor and sick to tend and nurse, there would be children

to teach and young girls to train, and here and there, perhaps, some aching, throbbing heart, tossed about and troubled as hers was now, to comfort and cheer. No one had helped her, but it might be her part to help and guide others by the light of her own experience. It might be for this, perhaps, that she was suffering now.

She made her arrangements quickly. She kept them a secret. It was of no use to consult anybody; it could only shake her determination, and not do anyone any good. A certain sum of money was to be handed over to the convent; the rest of her fortune was settled upon Arlotte and her husband. That, at least, would be of use to her sister's husband, she thought, a little bitterly, as she signed the papers. It was the first fruits of her sacrifice, she knew, for she did not hide from herself that her heart was not wholly in that which she purposed

doing. When all was arranged, she wrote a letter to Arlotte, in which she bade her farewell, and told her of her determination, but not of her destination.

“Do not seek for me, *petite*,” she wrote, and the paper was blotted with her tears. “It is best so, believe me, best for thee, and best, indeed, for me. Earthly love must not intrude upon the trance of heavenly love. Think of me sometimes a little tenderly, and forgive me if this gives thee pain, and remember that always my fervent, unfailing prayers will be for thee and thine.”

The letter ended abruptly, for Edmée could write no more. She sealed it up, and sent it, together with her *livre d'heures*, to Mrs. Murray, at Baden-Baden, and then taking Josette, her maid, she travelled away to Northern France, from where Arlotte's name had come, and where her mother's sister still lived, being a holy

woman, and the Lady Abbess of the Convent of Notre Dame de Bon Secours, at Pierreport.

Arlotte was frightened when she read Edmée's letter. She could not understand it at first, and when at last she did so, she became still more frightened.

"Edmée had no vocation for a convent life," she said, bewildered. "It is only people who have committed crimes who become nuns at such an age." (Edmée, with her five years' seniority, was a person of extraordinary longevity to the little wife.) "What has she done? Oh, can't we stop her, Charles?" she cried, wringing her hands helplessly.

Charles laughed, a horrible, mocking laugh that Arlotte had heard often of late, and always shivered under.

"How can we stop her, child, when we don't know where she has gone?" he said, in a harsh, grating sort of voice.

And then he turned and left her all day alone, as his way was.

He had understood at once, but he scarcely knew as yet what his own feelings were. Passion, rage, mortification, grief at having lost her, pride in the thought that it was *his* love that had driven her into a convent—all these feelings were warring together within his breast, and it was impossible to tell which was the dominant one, or which would conquer the rest. And then there was the money—that was something, at any rate, and there before him rose the gilded hells in which he might lose it, and himself too, for a time, at any rate.

As for Arlotte, she was completely *bouleversée*, as she would have said of herself. She wandered up and down the dreary empty rooms, (Colonel Murray did not like her to go out without a maid, and her last had been dismissed

a month ago and not yet replaced,) making feeble plans in her weak little mind, and talking helplessly to herself. She did not know her own misery, but she wanted to save her sister from what seemed to her a terrible fate. She felt she could do nothing, and yet she went on scheming and planning in her faint powerless way. She did not even know where Edmée was gone, and yet she was determined to prevent her going there!

She never thought of her aunt, the Abbess—in fact, she hardly knew of her existence. Edmée, who was older, had been to see her once or twice, but after the death of Comtesse Armand de Coulanges intercourse between the families had ceased, and the young daughters of the house had been educated at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, at Avignon. It never occurred to Arlotte that Edmée might have gone in search of this unknown aunt. She thought of the Sacred

Heart, and of other convents at Arles, and Marseilles, and Lyons, and even across the frontier and along the Riviera, where young ladies of noble birth and devout aspirations sometimes took the veil ; but she never thought of, she never mentioned, the name of Pierreport.

She ran over the names of the other convents to her husband when he came in. She begged and implored, she entreated and prayed him to fly hither and thither, and save and stop Edmée while yet there was time. He laughed at her again in his rough, hoarse way, grumbled over his dinner, and went out once more.

Poor little Arlotte ! she was not very wise, certainly. A very early marriage is apt sometimes to cramp a woman's understanding, even while it enlarges her affections. This was a little excuse for Arlotte, and it was perhaps one also for Colonel Murray.

When a man is greeted *chez soi* with alternate ecstasies and resignations, he generally makes his home-goings as few and as tardy as possible. When he encounters frowns there, he seeks, and finds too, smiles elsewhere. And in all cases, the more cause a man has to reproach himself, the less will he stand the reproaches of others.

In the course of that summer a little daughter was born to Arlotte and her husband. Neither of them, however, seemed to care much about it.

When the christening time came, the mother wished to call her child Edmée.

"It was my mother's name, and my sister's too; have you forgotten, Charles?" she said.

Colonel Murray gave her a look, the meaning of which was perfectly enigmatical to his poor little wife. And then he said, sharply and sternly, that *he* would

never call his child *Edmée*, and the baby was accordingly christened *Valentine*.

"He is afraid you will become a nun too, my poor little baby," said *Arlotte*, trying to explain to herself the meaning of her husband's strange objection to the name. She was rather given to ascribing motives to other people's words and ways, and did not much care whether they fitted or not, so long as they hung on somehow. "And yet you could not be like a better person than *Edmée*," she added with a sigh, which the baby echoed with a little gurgling whimper.

Arlotte liked playing with her baby, but she did not care much about it. She was a mere child still, and at seventeen the maternal instinct is rarely developed. It is not till a later period that the full tide of that passion begins to flow with all its mighty overwhelming force. Still she did long a little sometimes to show

“her baby” to the people who had known and loved its mother when she was a baby too, and she fancied that once amongst them again, she would surely hear something of her dear Edmée. Poor little soul! she clung with a feeble persistency to the old ties, now that the newer ones seemed to be hanging somewhat loosely upon her.

“Let us go home. I want to go home. If only we were at home,” was now the burden of her cry, and her sole topic of conversation with her husband. It was rather a monotonous one, certainly. But Colonel Murray took no notice. He was not only deaf to her entreaties, but dumb too, which probably encouraged her to say the same things over and over again. I have heard of slaves being tortured to death by means of a single drop falling at regular intervals on their heads. Colonel Murray was no slave. He was a tyrant, and the

continual drooping of the water had no effect upon him.

At last, however, he consented to return to Coulanges. The gambling rooms were closed; the summer was over; the autumn far advanced; there was only the winter to look forward to now, and Arlotte did not like the winter, short and sharp as it usually is in those sunny southern provinces of *la belle France*.

It was a dreary day when they first came in sight of the Château de Coulanges once more. There was no railway at that time nearer than Arles; and they had posted from thence along the straight high-road with its stiffened hedge-rows, and its long line of leafless poplars, looming through the mists like the ghosts of dead trees, and past the wayside village where Colonel Murray had first seen the sweet face of Edmée de Coulanges leaning out of the carriage

window, and smiling as she spoke; and so on through the woods, where the sisters had wandered together with their arms round each other's necks, and past the mill where Arlotte had first listened to the words of love, and across the bridge over which she had last driven as a day-old bride. Husband and wife had both so much to think of, that they found little to say to each other during that dreary drive.

It was a damp, drizzling day. The ground was wet with a fog that was colder than the rain, the sky was murky with mists that were thicker and greyer than the clouds. Even the people, loyal and loving, and French as they were, could scarcely venture out from their *cabanes* to offer a smiling welcome to the bride on this her tardy home-coming. It was a dismal one indeed. Arlotte shivered as the carriage turned up the chestnut avenue.

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window, and smiling as she spoke; and so on through the woods, where the sisters had wandered together with their arms round each other's necks, and past the mill where Arionne had first listened to the words of love, and across the bridge over which she had last driven as a lay-out bride. Husband and wife had been so much to think of, that they found time to say to each other during that merry time.

It was a damp, drizzling day. The ground was wet with a fog that was colder than the rain, the sky was murky with mists that were thicker and more than the clouds. Even the people, kind and loving, and French as they were, could scarcely venture out from their cabanes to offer a smiling welcome to the bride on this her very home-coming.

Nevertheless, through the mist, and the fog, and her own blinding tears, the poor little thing looked out eagerly. She had been wearying for a sight of these scenes so long.

She had thought of them so often, she fancied she remembered them all quite correctly. She could have told you the number of trees in the clump on the hill; her father had been so fond of trees, he would never have one cut down if he could help it. She fancied she knew too how the fields fitted one into the other, with no perceptible fence between them, as is the way in the south with large properties. But her fancy had played her false. She had forgotten that gap in the trees there, and the clump on the hill—the tall straight pines, where were they? She rubbed her eyes, and looked again, but she could not see them even then. And what was that, in the grass field

yonder ? a fence ? a wall ? actually a stone wall—how did it come there ? what did it mean ? Arlotte shuddered again.

How dull everything looked, the old grey château in the distance, with its frowning battlements, and night-capped towers, and then the fields and meadows close at hand, brown and damp with the remains of the year's garnered growth. And how dull she felt, too ! She had thought it would be different when she saw Coulanges once more, but she felt just as she used to feel at Baden-Baden, when she looked out on that eternal Black Forest with its grim waving trees, that always reminded her of the plumes of a hearse. Perhaps it was the wet day that made her feel so dismal. She appealed to her husband on this point, and he agreed with her. He generally did agree to his wife's remarks, if not to her wishes. It saved trouble, and it could not possibly matter.

He had long since taken to regard her as some curious cross between an infant and an idiot.

Yes—it was the dull day, of course. Arlotte was glad she had thought of that. There had been no dull days in the old times. She could not remember one. There need be none in the future? Arlotte did not feel so sure of that. There was the winter coming on, and Arlotte had a sort of presentiment, it would be a dreary one. And then, though her husband was very clever and kind, of course, still he was not altogether an amusing companion. Perhaps she was too young to amuse him, just as baby was too young to amuse her. Perhaps—— but here the carriage stopped at the château door, and she did not communicate her surmises to her husband. She got out and walked through the empty rooms, carrying the fog in with her, and feeling as though

a leaden weight were hung about her soul, and pressing her down heavily.

Arlotte's presentiments with regard to the winter were justified. Never had there been such weather in the memory of the oldest villager, who died of cold soon after making this statement. For weeks together the roads were blocked with snow, and the sky was as thick as a blanket. The sea-fogs came drifting over the woods and the valleys, and wreathed themselves round the towers and turrets of the old château, and hung like damp curtains before every window. Then the wind arose, and blew them back again to their lawful kingdom, and sundry tiles and chimney-pots after them. It was a frightful wind, waking up suddenly in the middle of the night, and bellowing like a giant round and round the old château, and into it too here and there. Arlotte

used to shake in her bed sometimes. She thought the whole house would be blown down. She would have found it very difficult to fulfil her old promise of making the place gay and joyous once more, had she tried to do so that wild, weary, frost-bound winter.

But she did not try. She seemed to have no power, or spirit, to do anything in those days. She was back in the old home, it is true, but she was out of tune with her surroundings; and little by little—through fear perhaps of jarring with the poor cold music about her—she became like a dumb note in an organ. Do you think there are only organs in churches, and orchestras in concert halls and opera houses? You mistake greatly. Why there are bands of music everywhere, in every home, in every school. “Wherever two or three are gathered together,” there is a band playing away vigorously. It does

not always play the music you wish for, but it plays music of all sorts—now a march, then a nursery song, often a love ballad, oftener still a dirge.

And sometimes, someone wants a solo all to himself, or someone else won't sing the second that is put before him; and then all the chords go clashing together wildly, and the treble and bass have a furious affray, but the music goes on just the same, though not quite so harmoniously, perhaps. And there is a part for everybody, if people would only do their best with it. But some people are mute because they cannot read their scores, and some because their lute strings are twisted, or because the right hand is not there to show them how to strike the chord, nor the right ear ready to catch and give them the key-note. Arlotte's part, I think, was a little flute-like trill, gay and rippling as any bird's, but she

did not perform it, because no one seemed to care to listen to it. Had Edmée been there, it would have been different.

But nothing was heard of Edmée. Josette's mother had indeed received one letter from her daughter, but it made no mention of Comtesse Edmée. It was full of raptures about the sea, and allusions to Pierrot and his profession, but it gave no address and it asked for no answer. It certainly led one to suppose that Comtesse Edmée and her maid were living somewhere by the sea-side. But even then, Arlotte never thought of Pierreport.

The good people of Josette's family were much exercised by this letter. What did it mean? Where had it come from? There was not even a post-mark upon it. It had been left at the door of Madame Jozeau's *cabane* by the weekly carrier, so they could not appease their anxieties by

writing. They appealed to Comtesse Arlotte, coming up in a stream one day—blue-bloused men and white-capped women, the relations and village friends of the missing maid—coming up to ask the advice of the great lady of the castle.

It was a pretty picture, but “the great lady” might as well have been omitted. She was of no use. She could tell them nothing. She could not give a scrap of comfort or help to anyone. Hers was not a helpful nature. She liked being helped herself—being taken care of, and told things. She hated guess-work, riddles, &c., Edmée knew that. And now, where was Edmée?

Meanwhile the baby Valentine thrived and grew apace, as babies mostly do, when no one is over-much anxious about them.

Meanwhile Colonel Murray’s debts grew too, and his means of meeting them waxed smaller and smaller. His affairs

became more and more involved. He journeyed hither and thither; more trees were cut down, more land let and parcelled out—the old De Coulanges property which had never yet been subdivided—and still ruin stared him in the face.

At last, one day he stood before Arlotte suddenly and sullenly, and told her to make her *paquets*, and be ready to start as soon as possible, for he had let the château for a term of years to a big rampaging American family.

Arlotte sat still, and stared at him blankly. She was never quick at understanding.

“They were coming from Marseilles out of Italy, *ces Américains*,” he said, “and they saw the Roman remains in the park, and the view of the amphitheatre at Arles from the bridge. Such things naturally please people who have no ruins at home, and they offered at once a

larger sum for the tumble-down old place than I ever have thought of asking. It is a perfect god-send," he went on, rather surprised at her silence but only too glad to take it all in good part, and be conciliatory himself. "So, *fais tes paquets, ma femme*, we shall be back again some day, never fear."

Arlotte waited till her husband had done speaking. Then she flashed out upon him :

"You have let *my* house—the home of my father's, which no stranger has ever yet entered uninvited," she cried, with clenched hands and quivering lips. "And you have dared to do it all without even asking so much as with, or without my leave."

"With, or without your leave?" repeated Colonel Murray, looking at her—half amazed at, half admiring the spirit he had stirred within her at last. It was like the anger of a little feeble

bird, but it was better, far better than the dumb apathy with which she had treated him of late, or the wild senseless ecstasies which had been her earlier way. "There seems to be nothing else we can do now, Arlotte," he added, in a gentler voice, which had almost a sad ring in it.

"Then," she retorted defiantly, throwing back her head, and taking no notice of the change that had grown into her husband's words and looks—"with your leave or without your leave, with or without your presence, it signifies nothing to me, I will remain here; here at Coulanges, sleeping under a tree, if there is no room for me at the château, living in the woods, when driven out from my own home—but here I will remain, to pray beside my father's grave, and watch for tidings of my sister, and save what I can of my property from my husband's hands. There is nothing else *I* will do."

Colonel Murray looked at her again,

anxiously, lingeringly. He was not touched by her words, which were all froth, and foam, and feebleness; but he was touched by her looks, her eyes that were flashing, her cheeks that were flaming, her lips that were burning with real pain and passion.

"It shall be as you wish," he said, in a low voice. And then he turned and left her.

The château was let. He could not undo that. But he did what he could for her besides. He found a little house at Belle-Fontaine, all overgrown with dropping purple flowers, and starry clematis, with a garden in front, and a pretty babbling brook behind. He took it for her, and settled her in it. He managed to provide her with money enough for her simple wants; he let her keep the child, he seldom troubled her with his presence.

Once she relented. It was the second

time he left her after she had gone to the cottage. "Oh, do not go!" she cried. "Do not leave me all alone."

But it was too late. The die was cast. The deed that had been done could not be undone.

And so there, all alone, in that tiny cottage, in that tiny village, lived the once proud heiress of half the woods and rivers round—the last born of the De Coulanges name—the girl Arlotte, who had despised the old monotonous days in the old grey château, and who had dreamt of a life, gay and glad and golden as the sun-motes dancing in the air, or the bubbles on the river's surface, and who awoke at last and found it—this!—

One snowy St. Geneviève's Day, some four years later, a novice, who had long been hesitating and waiting—watching if by chance anyone in the world should

make any sign of needing her again—
wearying herself with pangs, pains and
doubts, concerning the fitness of her
vocation and the worthiness of her
offering, considering where else, and how
else, she should lay down the weight of
her sins and the burden of her sorrows,
took the veil at last in the Convent of
Nôtre Dame de Bon Secours, at Pierre-
port.

That same day, far away in the village
beyond Coulanges, a lady lay dying in
the flower-wreathed house, while a little
five-year-old child stood beside her, look-
ing on gravely, with great circling grey
eyes.

The lady had been ill for months, and
no one had seemed to think much about
her. But since last week the doctor had
come oftener, and looked graver each
time, and yesterday he had brought with
him a nurse from the hospital at Mar-

seilles, and had sent off a message to some one in Paris.

To-day, however, she seemed to suffer less. She lay still and silent, with closed eyes and folded hands, seemingly asleep, or unconscious. Perhaps she would die thus, the nurse had said.

But the nurse was wrong.

Suddenly the lady started up, clutching at the bed-clothes, and gasping for breath.

"Oh Love—Love—Love!" she cried, piercingly sharp and clear. "Love for Love's sake only, or else love not at all."

And then, with a shudder, a spasm of pain that shook her whole body and contracted her features, she fell back motionless upon the pillows, and Arlotte de Coulanges, Colonel Murray's neglected, unloved wife, was dead.

The child caught the mother's last words, and was pleased with their sound. She

could not, by any possibility, understand what they meant; but she kept repeating them to herself, as though, in that way, she might, in course of time, arrive at their meaning. It was just as older people go on sometimes repeating a lie, until at last they come to believe it to be a truth.

“‘Love for Love’s sake only,’ what does it mean, Manon?” she asked of the nurse. “What is Love?”

Manon, the nurse, was a God-fearing woman, honest and just; but she had gone through hard times with a drunken husband and ungrateful children, and had come out hardened—a result, thank God, not always and not often the consequence of that process.

“Love,” she said, sternly, as she drew a sheet over the terribly still thing on the bed—“love is to please oneself, and leave others to fare as best they can. More than that I have never seen in all

the sixty years I have known the world."

"Love is to please oneself," repeated the child, not understanding this either, but storing it up for future use. And she went wandering in and out of the little cottage, and the woods and the water seemed to say the same thing.

That evening, at sunset, by the coach from Arles, a gentleman arrived. He was a stranger to the child, and to the nurse too, but not to the dead lady, it seemed.

The next day some more men came, three or four of them, with crape on their hats; also a low black carriage, with open sides and a gilded roof, and four black horses to draw it. And between them all they carried that poor dead lady away, and returned to the cottage without her.

The child stood at the door, watching all these proceedings. Manon had tied a black ribbon into her hair, and was stitching away at some black things in the room within.

The man who had known the poor dead lady patted the child's head as he passed and asked her what it was she was murmuring to herself.

"Love for love's sake only," said the child, looking up eagerly. "What does it mean?"

The man started and turned pale. Some such words as those he had heard, not from his dead wife's, but from his lost love's lips.

"Mean?" he said, recovering himself; "why, it means nothing at all. Look here, Valentine, here is the only thing worth loving—worth living for, in fact," and he drew a handful of gold out of his pocket.

"Love means money, then?" said the child, wondering more than ever, and stretching out her little fat hands towards the glittering coins.

But the man put temptation beyond her reach, and nodded at the child's shrewd-

ness. "She's sharper than her mother, at any rate," he thought to himself.

The next day he took her away with him. She was dressed in black, and Manon had packed up all her little things in a tiny skin-covered box. As the travelling carriage drove slowly over the old bridge, from which the peaked roofs and grey turrets of the Château de Coulanges could be seen, the child clapped her hands and began kissing the tips of her fingers. She knew the look of the old place, though she had never seen it so near before. She did not know her father, though he was sitting there by her side.

"Why do you do that?" he asked, watching her.

"Because it is mine," said the child, still kissing her hand, and gazing at the château as if trying to fix it on her mind's eye; "or it will be mine some day. *Maman me l'a dit. Maman* showed me many pictures of it."

"Yours—*Maman*!" echoed the father, with a hollow laugh. And then he clinched his money in his pocket, and laughed again. *Maman* was dead. The château was sold. The broad lands of the De Coulanges had passed into the hands of strangers.

But the child did not know this, of course, and even had she done so she would not have cared very much just then. Her quick ears had caught the tinkle of a bell, and the sound of voices ringing or singing at intervals in the hollow below. It might be some travelling show, or a pretty church procession, perhaps. The little Valentine loved sights and shows, and music above all things. She stood up in the carriage and peered out of the window, straining her eyes and listening with all her might.

It *was* a Church procession. She could see the cross gleaming in the sunshine; she could hear the deep-rolling Latin

chaunt. There was a boy with a bell, and another with a censor, and a long train of people behind. But it was not a pretty procession. All the women were weeping. All the men looked very grave.

It was a funeral procession toiling up the steep rough road, from the village of Coulanges to the grass-grown churchyard on the hill-side. The people of Belle-Fontaine were there too, for he whom they were going to bury had died a hero's death, and both villages were proud to claim him as their own. They had turned against him in his lifetime, but they knew him by his death. It is the way of the world, among peasants as well as princes. When the seal is removed its impression is seen. These were all common peasant folks, from the *curé*, who went on before with his choristers and acolytes, to the chief mourner who wailed behind the dead, holding the fluttering end of the pall. But the very nature of their occu-

pation seemed to refine them—for the time being, at any rate. Their grief made them gentle. Perhaps coarser natures scarcely realize how far mental suffering, and sorrow, and pain, go towards making a gentleman.

“What are they singing?” asked Valentine, as the driver of Colonel Murray’s carriage pulled up his horses and took off his hat, and the people went tramping towards the little church on the hill. “What are they singing?” she repeated, as Colonel Murray made no reply. “Is it the song the angels sing, that *maman* told me of?”

“*Mais oui, petite,*” answered the Colonel, abruptly; and then, as if to turn the child’s attention, “*Mais regardez plutôt ton château,* if you like to call it so, it is the last time you will ever see it.” And as Valentine strained her eyes, their driver moved on, and Colonel Murray and his daughter sped onwards on their journey.

And with Valentine how fared it in her young years, with so uncongenial a father? Why recount her young life, its ups and downs, its little pleasures and greater sorrows? Kind friends she sometimes found, hard blows she sometimes experienced; but yet she grew as children will grow under all circumstances; and when we next meet her you will be able to judge into what sort of girl poor Arlotte Murray's motherless daughter developed.





CHAPTER IV.

ST. MARK'S ROAD.

“ Heigh-ho, buttercups and daisies,
Fair yellow daffodils stately and tall,
A sunshiny world full of laughter and leisure,
And fresh hearts unconscious of sorrow and thrall,
Send down on their pleasure smiles passing its
measure,
God that is over us all !”

JEAN INGELow.



SPLENDID summer evening.
The sun had set, but the twilight had not yet begun ; there was just that sort of clear haze everywhere which seems to fall from heaven upon the earth “between the lights.” Over the hills and far away beyond the spread-

ing green country, the sun had no doubt gone down with a flare and a glare of crimson and gold, which, if colour could be translated into sound, would be as a trumpet blast ; while even here in London, there is beauty enough to make men lift their eyes from the earthly city and strive to catch a glimpse of the heavenly one. Even here there are walls "as of jasper," and streets "as of pure gold," gleaming and glistening in the setting sun.

But the glory and the crown of all was the sky—that luminous London sky, which is so seldom seen here, and never seen anywhere else. It was not like a country sky, clear-eyed and tender as the eyes of a country maid ; nor sapphire-hued, as it gleams in the south ; nor topaz-tinted, as it hangs sometimes over a dark northern moor. No, it was simply a blue-grey sky, pale, and very misty, and yet just such a sky as one fancies must be shining at this instant over the streets and

gates of the New Jerusalem—a sky misty with “the smoke of the incense” which ascends with the prayers of the saints, and yet luminous with the light of perfect love, even of God himself.

It was a summer evening, as I have said. It had been also a saint’s day, St. James’s day, I think. Evening service was just over at the old grey parish church of St. Mark’s. The vicar had taken off his surplice, the organist had pushed back all the music-making stops, the single chorister had shut up a little rose-bud of a mouth; and these three officials, who happened to be nearly related to each other—in fact, father and daughters—were making the best of their way home through St. Mark’s Road.

It was a long walk, and not exactly a pleasant one. Perhaps in the old days, when Richard of Glo’ster ate strawberries in the bishop’s garden at Holborn, and children gathered cowslips in the fields

round St. Martin's, the space between St. Mark's Vicarage and St. Mark's Church may have been fat glebe lands, whereon former vicars literally fed their sheep, and planted their seed, and saw it grow up and bear good fruit. But the latter-day vicars have no such pleasing occupations. The glebe lands have been turned into stony pasturages (a modern Gorgon method of the Hermetic art,) and the human sheep, more headstrong than those of old, live huddled together in pens unfit for brutes.

At this moment, however, they were scattered abroad throughout the length and breadth of the street—lambs fighting like young lions, ewes, limp and hungry-eyed, slinking about with poor thin faces and plaintive bleating voices, rams herded together in groups, with pipes in their mouths and hands in their pockets, and staring at each other and the passers-by in a painfully stupid, sheepish manner. There were sheep-dogs

among them too, dogs dressed up in black uniforms, and bands, and buckles, and buttons, and keeping a sharp look-out over the costermongers' carts, and bits of bone and meat in the butchers' shops. It was a sorry sight in this City of Feasts.

Through this unkempt, unwashed flock, then, the Reverend Edward Carmichael, Vicar of St. Mark's, went slowly shouldering his way. He saluted his parishioners gravely now and then, but he walked for the most part with his face bent and his hands hanging down loosely by his side. He was a tall dreamy-looking man with a stooping figure, and a general air of dilapidation and dreariness that seemed to hang about him like a fog. He was learned, and studious, and absorbed by nature, and very economical of speech. His name was known far and wide among all the learned societies of Europe, but many of his parishioners scarcely knew him by sight, the affairs of the parish

being chiefly conducted by Mr. Wynch, the curate, a nervous young man of an ardent temperament and an immense amount of energy.

Honor, Mr. Carmichael's eldest daughter, resembles her father. She is tall too, and has a pale grave face, and a pair of soft kind eyes, blue-grey like the sky. She has fair hair, a gentle voice, and very quiet ways. She is about nineteen years of age, and has been at the head of her father's household (a very small one) almost as long as she can remember.

Gladys, the other daughter, is only a little baby-thing, eight years old at most. She has laughing brown eyes, with topaz lights in them, and bright fuzzy hair, on which the sun seems to be always shining, and a mouth like the ever-smiling, ever-singing mouths (so, at least, Mr. Stephen Aylmer used to declare) of old Botticelli's angel-children. Not that she was like an angel in any other respect, being nothing more

nor less than an ordinary spoilt child, sharp and rather pert, and adored by Honor. For Gladys' mother was indeed among the angels, and Honor, though scarcely more than a child herself, had been as a mother to the little sister ever since she was born.

Such being the nature of the relationship between the two, the younger one, of course, made a complete slave of the elder, and tyrannized over her accordingly. Honor did not object, however; slaves never do of their own accord, it is said. It needs a zealous outsider to influence them with a burning sense of their own wrongs. Indeed, in her heart of hearts, I believe, Honor thought it was hard Gladys should have but one slave. Other children had fathers as well as mothers to bow down and worship them. But Gladys' father was a learned, dreamy, silent man, who took but little notice of his girls, and whose thoughts were buried in his books.

He had been blessed with a boy once, but he was dead, and now his wife was dead too. His girls were good girls, but they could not fill up the void these had left. Books might do so, perhaps. Study might help to distract his mind. At any rate he was trying the experiment.

"I wish it was Christmas time now," said Gladys the queen, pushing her little bright face over her father's hand, and looking at her slave as though she expected her to produce old Father Christmas, and all his usual accessories, out of her pocket at a moment's notice.

The slave smiled, as such slaves always smile.

"I suppose you are thinking of the Christmas-tree in the schoolroom, and all the presents you had given you last year," she said.

"No, I am not," replied the child disdainfully. "I am thinking of the lamps."

"The lamps—" repeated Honor, puzzled.

“Yes, the gas-lamps,” cried Gladys ecstatically. “I do so love to see the lamps lighted—you know I do, Honor. Don’t you remember last Christmas Eve, when we came back from shopping very late, and you *would* walk so fast that Stephen laughed, and I had to run to keep up with you? And then it grew quite dark, and they lighted all the lamps all down St. Mark’s Road, and there were lights before us, and lights behind us, and all over us too, for the sky was very clear, and bright, and full of stars. And down there, far away, all the lights seemed to join together and make one beautiful flame, and all the air round was quite soft and misty. And Stephen said, good people were like that, and their influence was like the golden light shed by the lamps—at least, he said something like that. Don’t you remember, Honor?”

“Oh yes, Queenie, I remember,” said Honor, flushing a little, and laughing

softly at the child's breathless eloquence. "And I am glad you have such a good memory, too, for it will be some time before you see the lamps again. However, you will have the sea to look at meanwhile, and that will do instead, won't it?"

"Oh yes—the sea—and the funny stupid French people who won't be able to speak English," said the child, who was at that happy age when a thought can be turned aside as easily as a blind man out of his path. "And there will be no horrible boy's school at Pierreport, either, will there, Honor?" she added, a little anxiously; this last remark being suggested by the advance of a small regiment of small boys, whom Gladys, in some mysterious manner, regarded as her natural enemies, and would scowl at accordingly, as a kitten will scowl at a litter of puppies, always provided the kitten is at a safe distance off, say nestling on the lap of a velvet gown.

This Liliputian regiment was commanded by a female general, Miss Pincock by name, a fussy little woman, whose sombre uniform of black was resplendent with bugles. It was escorted by the general's aide-de-camp and pupil-teacher, Master Carraway, who was lean, and lanky, and rapid of growth, and consequently afflicted with a chronic suit of undersized garments, out of which his neck, and wrists, and ankles protruded painfully.

"So you are really going to-morrow," says the general, who, with her aide-de-camp, had halted to speak to the Carmichaels, while their infantile forces went marching on through the streets, hustling the passers-by, and scattering confusion into the hearts of sundry rickety old apple-women, who had taken root on the edges of the pavement.

"Yes," replied Honor, shaking hands with Miss Pincock, whilst her father was

slowly waking up to the sense that someone was speaking to him, and Gladys was glaring at Master Carraway with malevolent eyes. "Yes, we are going to Pierreport to-morrow. I hope we shall have a good crossing."

"I *hope* so too," returned Miss Pincock, emphatically. (She always talked in italics.) "And a pleasant time whilst you stay at Pierreport. As for Gladys, *she* is sure to be *happy*—happier than happy, in fact, what with the sands and the shells——" but here the flow of the little lady's eloquence was suddenly arrested by Mr. Carmichael, who being awake at last, held out his hand, which was vigorously seized and wrung up and down by Miss Pincock, as though it were a pump-handle and she a drawer of water.

A series of farewells ensued, good in principle, but tedious in practice—at least so thought little Gladys—and then the friends separated.

“Honor, how can any one be happier than happy?” asked the child, as the sisters trudged on once more, one on each side of their father.

Honor said nothing. She only smiled that steady, silent, loving smile, with which she often greeted the little one’s questions.

“It would be like having too much sugar in one’s tea, I suppose,” continued the child, compelled to answer herself, as her way often was. “Only the tea would be sure to brim over and spill, if you put too many lumps of sugar into it; and that could not happen to happiness, could it, Honor?”





CHAPTER V.

HAPPIER THAN HAPPY !

“ Then how grace a rose ? I know a way,
Leave it, rather.
Must you gather ?

Smell, kiss, wear it ? at last throw away ! ”

ROBERT BROWNING.

DEAR readers, I hope you are not already tired of the walk down St. Mark's Road. I told you from the first that it was a long one, and we have yet much further to go.

We have a good many more friends to meet, too. There was Mr. Himmins, the schoolmaster, who way-laid the vicar

outside the tripe-shop, and unfolded to him a long list of prospective misdemeanours on the part of school-children's pennies ; also Mrs. Trimmings, the pew-opener, who was deaf, as well as communicative, and required to have every remark made to her twice over, which spun out the interview to an indefinite length. There was the Curate, too, the Reverend Auriol Wynch, who went by during the Carmichaels' gossip with Mrs. Trimmings, and who did not stop, but passed on with a bow and a blush.

Poor Mr. Wynch ! he deserves more than a line in this history, though that was all the conqueror of Europe expected in the history of the world. Not that the Curate himself had anything of the conqueror about him. On the contrary, he was a mild-looking little man, with a nervous shrinking manner and a perpetual twitch in his features, which

had made Gladys say one day, that—

“Papa’s Curate must have been the original naughty little boy who had made an ugly face, and it had stuck to him ever since, just as his nurse had prophesied it would do, though he was always trying to pull his face back to proper shape.”

Children of any imagination are always on the look-out for the visible wages of sin, and are apt to consider personal imperfections as an outward sign of inward deformity—so that to them, Richard III.’s hump was a token of his murderous intentions towards his nephews.

This was hard upon Mr. Wynch, who was a good man, a good parson, and a good preacher. He had good prospects too, and it was whispered that he lingered on so long in this unfashionable Curacy of St. Mark’s, because somebody else had not yet put off the buckled-shoes and

broad-brimmed hat which he was destined one day to put on. Indeed, a deanery was the least thing that could happen to him, according to Miss Pincock, who took quite a sisterly, one might almost say a motherly, interest in the ugly Curate. Nevertheless, appearances were against him, and in the estimation of little Gladys, Mr. Wynch was but one degree better than Master Carraway.

“There is someone else posting along behind us almost as fast as Mr. Wynch, only the other way,” said the child, looking round to see if the Curate were safe out of sight. “Who do you think this can be, Honor?”

But before Honor had time to think, she knew—for a well-known step was close behind her, a well-known voice was saying,

“Good evening, Mr. Carmichael.”

The Vicar looked round startled.

“ Ah ! Aylmer, my boy, is that you ?” he says, with surprising heartiness. “ Why, where did you spring from ?”

“ Well—from the Club last, I think,” returned the young fellow, shaking hands all round. “ But for the last ten minutes I have been tracking your steps like a detective. I went to the Church first, and found you had just gone.”

“ Then it is lucky you detected to-night, for to-morrow night we shall not be here to detect,” said Gladys, catching the word, but feeling rather vague as to its meaning.

“ To-morrow night !” repeated the young man, puzzled. “ What does she mean, Honor ?”

“ She means—” replied Gladys, laughing saucily, and throwing the words over her shoulder, as it were ; for the Vicar had moved on again with the child clinging to his arm, like a tiny limpet to a grim grey rock—“ she means that we are going

away to France to-morrow. I am so glad, and so is Honor—we have just been talking about it. And so, you see, we shall not be here,” added the child, rather at a loss how to perorate her sentence gracefully.

Mr. Aylmer’s face assumed a blank expression, which Honor obligingly endeavoured to fill up for him.

“Are you so very much surprised, Stephen?” she said, with a smile, as she strolled along by the young man’s side. “I suppose it is really rather astonishing, seeing that we so seldom leave home. But this seemed a chance. An old college friend of papa’s, who is the English chaplain at Pierreport, wrote and offered to exchange duties with him for six months, and after a little consideration, papa wrote back and accepted the offer.”

“Accepted! for six months!” echoed Stephen, who did not seem to be

particularly well-furnished with original remarks to-day. "And why was I not told of this before, pray?"

"It has only just been settled," replied Honor, wondering a little at the aggrieved tone in which her companion spoke. "Of course I should have written to tell you about it before we went away, but I felt sure—at least, I mean, I thought you would come to-night. It is so long since you have been at the Vicarage, you know. Why, Stephen, you look quite grave," she added, snatching with a sort of confused indifference at the first idea that came into her head, as we all do, when we feel we have been betrayed into exhibiting any unnecessary interest in any subject or person. "Don't you like our going to Pierreport?"

"Do *you*?" said Aylmer, turning upon her suddenly, and looking at her rather eagerly.

"Yes, I think I do," replied the girl,

frankly. "It is stupid never to have been anywhere. One might as well have lived before the days of steamboats and railroads. I have only been once as far as Margate in all my nineteen years of life, and Gladys has never been anywhere at all. It will do *her* good, at any rate."

"Yes—that's it—always Gladys," cried Aylmer, impatiently swinging his stick round and round, and apparently aiming his remark at a freshly-painted lamp-post they happened to be passing at that exact moment. "You think of no one but Gladys, Honor."

"Who else have I to think about, Stephen?" said the girl simply. But Mr. Aylmer disapproved of the sentiment, and did not deign to answer it.

They walked on a few steps in silence.

"Since you think it so stupid never to have been anywhere," he said at length, reverting to a former remark of Honor's,

"how would you like to go a little further than Pierreport and see a number of new places?" He had turned the light of his countenance upon her again, and was watching her rather closely as he spoke.

Honor looked at him too. She was puzzled by his strange manner, and unusually grave way of speaking.

"See a number of new places," she repeated. "What do you mean——"

And then suddenly, she too seemed to be afflicted with Mr. Aylmer's late infirmity of looking aside. Only in her case, it was the area-railings, and not the lamp-posts, that took her fancy.

It was very aggravating of her, wasn't it? It is always so aggravating of people not to follow our train of thought, however vaguely or recklessly we may drive it along the beaten track of words. Stephen must try something slower, and surer, and plainer. He *must* make

her understand to-day. He could not wait a moment longer. He had waited for months, years he might almost say, with this same thought smouldering in his breast. Now it had sprung up into a sudden flame, Honor must be made to see it.

“I mean—” he said, tugging away at his moustache, and speaking in a strange sort of grating voice, like a carriage going down hill with the drag on—“oh, Honor, can’t you guess what I mean? We have known each other so long, and have been so much together, but we shall see little of each other in the future, unless—” (there must have been a very big stone in the way just then, safely bumped over, however) “unless you can give me a little bit of your life in exchange for my whole love, and go with me wherever fortune may call me—unless you can make a little room for me in your heart,” (rather bitterly)

"which Gladys seems to have appropriated altogether."

A series of jogs, a mighty thump, then a full stop, but whether the carriage were at the top or the bottom of the hill, the owner thereof did not know himself.

Honor, however, understood at last, though for a moment she could not say so.

The people went hustling and bustling by, the cabs and carriages went rolling past. Stephen and Honor themselves walked on, neither slower nor faster, but just exactly as they had been doing for the last quarter-of-an-hour. And yet all was changed. There was a silent, solemn, pulseless pause within her, like the hush that falls upon the waves when they go curling back from the shore, and stand caught together for a second in a great white heap. The next moment they rush forward again,

kissing the sands as they go, and tumbling tumultuously one over the other. Then Honor's heart begins to throb once more, beating back a little faint colour to her cheeks, sending a few faint trembling words to her lips.

"Stephen—dear Stephen—don't say that. I think—I think there is room."

Were those the words she said? Stephen never knew. He only felt as though some windows in heaven had been suddenly flung open, and the stream of passionate delight had flowed over, and flooded his soul.

"Do you really mean it—my darling—my darling!" he cried. And then his voice too seemed suddenly to have gone from him, passed away into silence, as darkness into light—as stars into space—as life into love!

They crossed the road, and turned down the little lane leading to the Vicarage. It was a narrow ill-paved

passage, bounded by two high grey walls. But to them, at that moment, it seemed suddenly to have become a *vrai chemin du Paradis*. The walls were garnished with precious stones, the pavement was strewn with pearls. It is so with us all. We furnish our way as we go, sowing amaranthine flowers, hanging up magical pictures which we fondly fancy will live for ever. They do not live—they cannot last—weeds grow faster than flowers, and the good seed is choked up—and the fog comes in, and the sun, and the dust, and the rain, and our pictures get faded and spoilt, and lose all likeness to realities. But it is something to have possessed them once, and to be able to carry about the memory of them for ever.

Stephen and Honor walked slowly down their *chemin du Paradis* (which was otherwise known to the world by the less romantic name of Racket's Alley) and pushed open the little garden-gate in the

wall. And there, yonder, was an angel waiting for them—an angel in a white frock and a broad-brimmed hat, standing under the verandah, flapping her arms to and fro, as though they had been wings.

“How dreadfully slowly you must have walked,” cries the angel, spreading her wings, and flying down upon them, with somewhat more speed than Mr. Aylmer thought at all necessary. “I, and papa have been home such a long time—and oh! Honor how hot your cheeks look, and why do your eyes shine so brightly?”

“I think because I am so happy—so extra happy to-night, dear,” whispers Honor, burying her hot cheeks in a tangle of sun-coloured hair. The sisters have left Mr. Aylmer standing on the grass-plot, and are going up the verandah steps together, clinging to each other.

“So extra happy,” repeats the child

musingly, "that must be happier than happy, I should think—only—only—I hope, Honor, your cup is not so full that it will brim over and spill !"





CHAPTER VI.

THE FULL CUP.

“ There grows a flower on every bough,
Sing heigh-ho !
There grows a flower on every bough,
Its petals kiss—I’ll show you how,
Sing heigh-ho and heigh-ho,
Young maids must marry !”

CHARLES KINGSLEY.



T. MARK'S VICARAGE is not a modern model parsonage, neither is it situated in a pleasant part of London. It is an old-fashioned house, square topped, and built of brick, with several sham windows outside, and a good deal of space

wasted inside. It stands a little way back from St. Mark's Road; and the next best house in the parish is a gin palace.

Behind the Vicarage, however, as if to make amends for its somewhat ill-favoured face, there lurked an unsuspected garden. It was only a small, narrow, walled-in scrap of ground, hardly worthy of the name of garden; but just such a bit of green light and shade as one stumbles upon sometimes amid a tangle of streets, like an odd feast-day coming in the middle of the week, or a single bright spot in an otherwise dull monotonous life.

It was not much of a place certainly, and one almost wondered to see any flowers there at all. But there were some: a dejected-looking honey-suckle, flapping feebly over the wall, some stunted geraniums, and early blighted fuschias set about in pots.

There was also a square of grass in the centre, honoured by the name of "the lawn," and at the far end a biggish bed of hollyhocks, which every autumn pushed up their bright heads, and looked out on the world with their many-coloured eyes. The one tree, however, was the pride of the place; it was a weeping-willow, and was extremely lavish of its tears. Some ivy, too, went crawling over the house, and round the arches of the old verandah. It was smoke-dried and blackened, and carried on the same mournful and funereal suggestions. Indeed altogether the place was not unlike a churchyard—and not a pretty modern "God's acre" either, bedded with flowers, and tended with loving pious care, but an old, neglected, long-forgotten place of tombs; grim and damp and mouldy-looking.

Nevertheless, dreary and dismal as it might seem to others, it was as the

garden of Eden itself to more than one of its occupants that night. The roar of the streets beyond came drifting in a gentle murmur over the wall and the budding hollyhocks; lights were set in the old brick house; an old man sat bending over his papers in one of the lighted rooms, a little child's voice went ringing up and down the passages, and in and out of the house; but Adam and Eve in the garden neither heard nor saw any of these things. For love, thank God, is a hardier plant than we sometimes think, and will spring up spontaneously in the dimmallest spots, devoid of light, or space, or air—ay, even against prison walls, or in fetid alleys, where fainter flowers, such as truth, or patience, or justice, or fair dealing, absolutely refuse to grow.

They were sitting under the willow-tree—they had been having tea there, in fact. It was a long standing promise

to Gladys that they should do so, on this last night in London; and the child was not one to forget such a promise.

Nor would anyone have wished her to forget, for the feast had been a pleasant one, though of a silent order. Mr. Carmichael, who never contributed much to the general stock of conversation, on other occasions, always kept a book beside his plate at feeding times.

Gladys had flitted about hither and thither in the lawless manner dear to his heart, whilst Stephen had sat by Honor's side, pouring water into her tea-pot, putting sugar into the cups, doing those hundred and one nothingnesses, which are so small and trivial in themselves, but which mean so much when done under certain conditions and by certain hands. For love is a sacrament—a baptism unto a new life, and its tiniest acts, and words, and looks, are the signs and forms thereof, like the

cross made in water on the child's brow, which implies the whole scheme of redemption in all ages.

And then, by-and-by, Mr. Wynch had come in, and had drunk his tea with a series of twitches, and looked back wistfully at the pair under the tree, as his Vicar hurried off to the lighted-up room, and the parish papers. And Gladys had gone off also, to superintend the packing of her doll's wardrobe, no doubt, and enjoy a few last passages of arms with Martha, the maid. And the other two had sat on in that subtle silence, which is often more expressive than all the talking in the world, while the earth grew dimmer and darker, and the amber-tinted sky deepened into solemn purple at night's holy approach; and all round the soft London atmosphere which is at once so misty and so luminous, waxed golden and tremulous, as down St. Mark's Road Gladys' be-

loved lamps were being lighted one by one.

Ah! those happy moments—"if they could but last," as the mason said, whilst still in the air, when he fell from the house-top to the street below.

"There is more of life's delight
In one hour such as these, than many years;
For life is measured by intensity,
And not by dial, dropping sand, or watch."

"How beautiful everything is!" said Honor, breaking the silence at last. There are times when silence becomes oppressive, and feelings must find their vent in words.

"Even I?" asked Stephen, with a smile. "In the old days, you used to say I was the ugliest, crossdest, hate-fullest boy that ever was born. Have you changed your opinion now?"

The girl's only answer was a smile; but what a smile! bright and beautiful

as the sun's first glint on the dew-drops, sweet, and swift, and sure as the summer lightning, when it tears the sky open, and shows us through the rent a glimpse of the gleaming white heavens beyond. Then she rose suddenly, and pushed her way out from under the willow branches.

"Honor, you do not speak—you do not answer me," said Stephen, following her, and arresting her steps, as she reaches the old verandah. "Have you nothing to say to me? Shall I come to Pierreport for my answer?"

"To Pierreport—yes," she whispers, looking at him with her frank tender eyes, while the low-growing leaves fan her cheeks, and kiss her soft smooth hair.

"And till then you will be as silent to everybody else as you have been to me, won't you, Honor?" says Stephen, looking at her with passionate delight.

"Silent?" repeats Honor, with a start.

"Silent—upon this little matter—which —which we have settled together to-night," returned Stephen, hesitating, while he fingers rather nervously the dusky ivy leaves that seem to be holding a sort of moonlight revel round him. "You see, I would rather tell your father myself, and there is not time to do so now. Besides, my prospects are not very brilliant at present; I have not yet received the promised letter from my uncle in India."

"India! oh, Stephen!" said Honor. And then her hands, which had been fingering the leaves too, dropped down and fell into each other.

It was a sudden revelation. Until that moment Honor had never realized that her cup of happiness being full—brimming over, in fact, as little Gladys had said—something must needs spill out of it. And that something—what was it going to be?

Honor knew, but she dared not answer the question, even to herself. She only stood there, still and silent, with her hands caught together and her head drooping as she listened to a certain rustling and shuffling that was going on behind the hollyhock hedge.

"I shall follow you very soon," said Stephen, interpreting her change of countenance in the manner most flattering to himself. And then he pushed his own face up a little nearer, the better to look at hers, no doubt.

They are close together, for Honor is still standing on the verandah-steps, and Stephen is leaning against the iron railing below. Their lips just meet—like flowers blown together by the soft summer wind—the dark curly locks and the fair shining hair mix and mingle together for a moment—then a bird-like voice from behind the hollyhocks—

"Gladys!" cried Honor, turning away

from Stephen's arms and darting up the verandah steps.

"Always Gladys," said Stephen, not jealous now, as indeed he had no right to be; but looking after her and laughing, as he strode away in the darkness with the echo of her voice ringing in his ears.





CHAPTER VII.

PROTOPLASMS !

" Then when we meet and thy look strays toward me,
Scanning my face and the changes wrought there,
' Who,' let me say, ' is this stranger regards me,
With the grey eyes, and the lovely brown hair ?' "

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

STEPHEN AYLMER was in that chronic condition common to many young men of the present day. He was waiting for something to do.

He had been waiting a long time, five or six years at least ; in fact, ever since he had left the roof of the Rev. Edward

Carmichael, whose pupil he had been. Nor did there seem any immediate prospect of his patience being rewarded. Meanwhile he was amusing himself by playing at various professions, taking care to leave off each game directly he found himself beginning to tire of it.

Once, indeed, soon after he had left the vicarage, Sir Henry Aylmer, governor of an Indian province, and the young fellow's uncle, had written and offered his nephew a post in that country. But Stephen, who was at that time enjoying himself at Oxford, and who had not quite made up his mind as to whether he meant to become a poet or a painter, had declined the offer with very scanty thanks. Whereupon the uncle had relapsed once more into silence or indifference, and being a man of a scriptural turn of mind, "washed his hands" of his nephew, as he himself expressed it.

From Oxford young Aylmer went to Munich, and from Munich to Florence, and from thence half round the world. He did not go to India, however, but travelled as he said to make sketches and pick up ideas. He had no lack of talents. On the contrary, his misfortune was to possess too many, and they all seemed to be fighting within him for supremacy one against the other, like tradesmen in a country town competing for custom.

He had an ardent artistic temperament, neutralized by intense restlessness. He could work for an hour, he could be enthusiastic for a day; but he soon wearied even of his own emotion, and, as I have said, was given to skimming the cream off a good many things, and to abandoning each when the time came for churning the cream into butter. Am I wrong in thinking that a taste for cream, and an incapacity for churning, is one of the saddest

gifts nature bestows upon her children?

Young Aylmer laboured under another disadvantage. He was an orphan (which perhaps accounted for his remaining so long under Mr. Carmichael's tuition), and his father's small fortune had lain by for a good many years, and consequently accumulated pleasantly. When Stephen came of age he found himself rich enough to be careless of work, but not independent of it. His fortune was sufficient to enable him to live comfortably, and enjoy himself moderately, but not sufficient to pay for all his various experiments in various professions. The life at Munich and the studio at Florence had cost something, and there were bills coming in from Oxford still. He found when he returned from his grand tour that he had broken in upon his capital. This alarmed him. He was not near starvation yet, but he was sufficiently frightened to swallow a biggish slice of humble pie. He wrote to his uncle

and inquired meekly whether there was any post now vacant in his province which he was qualified to fill? It was Honor who urged him to do this. She looked over his shoulder as he wrote, and sealed the letter when it was finished.

"It will be so good for you to have some real work to do," she had said in her old-fashioned motherly sort of way.

Stephen looked at her doubtfully. It was one of the times when he thought she might have guessed a little at that story he was obliged to tell her so plainly in St. Mark's Road.

In course of time, an answer came from India. It was brief, and to the point. There was no vacancy at present. It was possible one might occur shortly. Should this be the case, Sir Henry would write again. Meanwhile Stephen would do well to qualify himself for any appointment by improving his knowledge of Hindustanee and Indian affairs in general.

Stephen and Honor were great friends. They had always been so since the awful moment, when he, a long-legged awkward boy of ten had first stood in the Vicarage drawing-room, and was stared at mercilessly by four other boys, whose companion he was destined to be, while his tutor went blundering about among the chairs and tables, and blinked at him feebly now and then, and made faint remarks to an invalid lying on a sofa near the window, from the side of whom a little toddling girl came forward and put her small soft hand into his, and looked up at him with her blue-grey eyes, and lisped "*I will like you, boy.*"

It was very absurd, almost laughably so. It was just like the mouse that tried to patronize the lion, or the daisy who declared she would keep all the dew-drops that fell to her share in her golden cup for the overshadowing oak-tree to drink. So, at least, thought Stephen Alymer, as the

little child's soft fingers silently stole into his own grimy palms. But all the same their touch comforted him. He had been used to blind adoration from his mother hitherto, and now there seemed to be no one to offer it, or indeed to take any notice of him at all except this child. The boy valued her attentions accordingly and drank daily of the daisy's dew. I wonder whether he ever remembered the fate of that little flower?

They were great friends, but they used to quarrel a trifle now and then. The oak-tree would be rough at times, and then the daisy would shut up her golden cup and let him have no more dew that day. Next day, however, she would give him a double allowance; which is a way many women have of reconciling a past sense of injury with a present gush of compassion. And if there is not much justice in it, there is at any rate a good deal of pathos.

Honor's nature was essentially womanly, and from a very early age she had learnt to be motherly. She had not had much care taken of herself, poor little soul, but she had early learnt that her way of life was to take care of other people. Her mother had been a confirmed invalid, whose colourless existence was scarcely missed from the house when it vanished, save by the husband to whom she had been the "one love of his life," and the little daughter who had grown up to bear her parent's burdens with a patience and tenderness beyond her years. And then there was Gladys, a mere baby, laid upon the lap of another baby, but who yet lacked nothing of a mother's care, or a mother's love. It is a great thing, no doubt, to discover one's vocation in life, but it is rather a misfortune, I think, to have to practice it whilst one is very young.

It certainly was so to Honor Carmichael.

At a time when other girls are counting balls and their parties, or at best, evolving a new dress out of an old one, this little motherless maiden was adding up the butcher's bills, and gravely discussing infantile diseases with the family doctor. She led an isolated life, and had no one to guide her, and nothing to lean upon, except her own judgment—which is generally a broken, or at any rate a feeble uncertain reed for so young a girl. Her governess had died when her pupil was seventeen, and it had not been thought necessary to replace her. Her father, who had always disliked society, had shut himself up entirely since his wife's death, and lived among his books like an oyster in its shell. He gave up taking pupils, and devoted himself to his studies. Meanwhile, Honor, who was only a girl, not a book, grew up (almost unknown to her father) with a sweet, eager, wistful face, and a heart so full of tender cares and home

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duties, there seemed to be scarcely any room in it for anything or anyone else.

"I do not know—I think I must be very cold-hearted," she had said one day to Mr. Wynch, the curate, to whom she had once been engaged for a weary month; "I have tried, but *I* do not feel as if I should ever be able to love you."

"Perhaps your time for love has not yet come, dear," the good little man had answered, hoping against hope, and twitching his poor face terribly, as he took back the ring he had placed on her finger himself, and which she now pulled off of her own accord with a delicious tug of relief.

"I do not think I shall ever have time to love," she said, flushing up. "Not anybody or anything new, I mean," she added, trying to make matters smooth, but failing altogether so far as Mr. Wynch was concerned. And then she went back to her butcher's books, and let down a

tuck in Gladys' frock, and looked out the sermon her father was to preach next Sunday, and tried between whiles to feel a little sorry for Mr. Wynch, but only succeeded in feeling—oh! so glad for herself. After all, she certainly could not be much of a loss to anyone, except perhaps to the home people, and all the old things there. So, at least, she thought of herself.

Stephen Aylmer, I suppose, must have been a part of the old things, for he seemed to slip quite easily into his place immediately after his return from his journey round the world. Perhaps, in truth, he had never slipped out of it, though Honor told him frankly she had not thought of him once during all his five years' absence, and should certainly not have known him in his present bronzed and bearded condition, had his name not been announced at the door.

"Should you not?" said Stephen, not

quite knowing whether to be offended or amused. He had been accustomed of late to a certain amount of flattery and deference from mothers who believed his fortune to be greater than it was, and daughters who admired his sentimental dark eyes and dreamy poetic air; and here was this girl, whom he had known from her babyhood, and who had lived in a hole all her life—a London hole, be it well understood, narrow and cramped, and smoke-beclouded—and who had known nothing, and seen nothing, and felt nothing, snubbing him on their very first interview after a long separation. It was either very humiliating or very ludicrous.

She was a pretty girl, however—a very pretty girl indeed she looked, as she sat there under the old verandah, with the shadow of the wind-swayed leaves flecking her fair hair and her grey dress; and her soft blue-grey eyes looking up at him

with that strange, wondering, unconscious Undine expression in them, which they never wholly lost in all the long years that came after, in which her soul was wide awake, and painfully alive to every breath of love, and hate, and joy, and pain; yes, she was certainly looking very pretty just then, or else the travelled and most experienced Stephen would hardly have taken the pains to continue his conversation with her.

"Then I am glad to find that my memory is better than yours," he said. "*I* should have known you anywhere; you have not changed a bit."

Honor laughed incredulously.

"Not changed a bit!" she cried. "Why I was only fourteen when you went away, and now I am nearly twenty, and feel a hundred."

"That may be so," maintained Stephen, stoutly, "but all the same you are not changed a bit."

And Stephen was right. Honor was not changed a bit, had hardly grown at all. She was a child still—a child in her utter unconsciousness and absorption in her present duties—a child in her total want of thought and feeling for the future. In some ways, indeed, she was quite as much of a child as Gladys herself, and it was only after hearing of some of the wonders of the world from Stephen Aylmer, that she found out it was stupid to have lived in one place all her life. That young craftsman had been half inclined to resent, half disposed to profit by the result of his handiwork.

It is true there are people who go through life without making such discoveries, and it is also true that they are by no means the least agreeable or the most useless folks in the world. Sisters who live in communities often do so, and so do women who are brought up and nurtured by the tenderest care, and who,

in the course of nature, pass from love to love, and change their homes and duties perhaps, but not their conditions of life. But it was not to be so with Honor; it never is, I think, with those whose destiny it is to influence in any great measure other lives by their own. She had slept long, but she was going to wake now. We must be awake to move ourselves or others. We may toss about, talk incoherently in our sleep at times; but then, who cares to listen?





CHAPTER VIII.

PIERREPORT.

"Strong and free, strong and free,
The flood-gates are open—away to the sea."

CHARLES KINGSLEY.

THE Carmichaels had a prosperous journey both by land and by sea. Miss Pincock's aspirations for her friends' welfare on that point were gratified.

They have been, by this time, about three weeks at Pierreport, and certainly, so far as her father and little Gladys were concerned, Honor had had no reason to regret the chance that had brought

them thither. Mr. Carmichael, in particular, looked ten years younger, and twenty degrees better than he had done in London. He had brought his books with him, but he took them out walking over the long yellow sands, or up and down the steep, twisting, winding street, and he read them as he went, instead of in his stuffy little study at home. He still kept them beside him at meal-times, but he made a ponderous joke one day about "Bacon for the mind, and bacon for the body," which was highly appreciated, and ever after he tried to say something elephantinely funny concerning the quaint little dishes prepared for him by the united efforts of Honor and Rosaline, the cook. He even caught himself laughing once, over some little witticism of Gladys', in an odd, pathetic, half-sad, half-wistful way that touched Honor strangely. When would they all be so happy together again? How strange it

is that grown-up beings can never enjoy the present, without over-shadowing it by a thought of either the future or the past. Honor, you see, was a child no longer. She had a future now.

As for little Gladys, her days were passed in a series of ecstatic delights, to which the hours by no means sufficed. She passed long sunny mornings on the sands, piling up palaces which the waves knocked down. She tasted the sea-foam, and found its saltness intoxicating. She dabbled her little white feet in shallow, shining, sun-warmed pools of water, left behind, forgotten, perhaps, by the sea, their mother. She went to market with Rosaline, where two sous bought more than two sous have ever done before or since; while men in blue blouses, with their hands in their pockets, and their feet among pots and pans, (the apparently chronic condition of market-men in France,) would turn cautiously amid

their crockery and stare at the English child, with her floating hair like *vrais fils d'or*; and old wrinkled-faced women, sitting cosily under gigantic umbrellas, red, blue, green, *au choix*, would hunt among their freshest wares, and find many a ripe *reine claudé*, bursting with yellow sweetness, for the lips of the *'tite princesse*, or present her with great bunches of creamy pink roses to match her cheeks. French people, even among the lower orders, have always such a passion for beauty.

Furthermore the child had established a nodding acquaintance with her opposite neighbour, the little curly-headed son of a hairdresser, Gaspard Bonnet by name. Also she had made a friend among the sisters of the Convent of Notre Dame de Bon Secours hard by, and on one occasion had nearly precipitated herself from the window in her anxiety to kiss her hand to Sœur Geneviève. She learnt to jabber

French fast enough ; she wore a big flopping hat and yellow sand-boots ; her little hands grew sunburnt, her tiny turned-up nose was freckled, her—but what is the use of writing down all these things ? Every blade of grass has its drop of honeydew, every grain of sand a diamond for such children as Gladys Carmichael.

And Honor ?

With Honor all was well too, and even if had not been so, I don't think anyone would have been the wiser. She was never a girl to think much about her own feelings, in fact, as she would have told you herself, she had never hitherto had time to do so. If other people were happy, that was enough for her. There is a Turkish proverb which says, "The candle does not give light to itself." If those she loved had light enough—love, and all the other necessities of life, Honor was quite content to be their candle.

But at Pierreport, it must be con-

fessed, she had more time for thinking about herself than she ordinarily had in London. There were no schools to visit here, nor any poor parishioners to lament with over short-comings in the matter of coals, or the degeneracy of things in general. Neither were there any weekly worries in the shape of butchers' bills ; Rosaline undertaking all the details of housekeeping, and performing her duties in the most jealous and mysterious manner. So Honor was free to dream dreams, and think about her secret all day long if she chose. And as she found both occupations very agreeable, she spent a good deal of her time upon them, especially upon the latter. For a secret which is all one's own (all one's own and one other's, *bien entendu*) not unfrequently gets more attention than it deserves. One must look at it so often to see if it is safe.

It was so with Honor. She was always

pulling out her secret, and looking at it in such a constant and open manner, that she used to wonder sometimes that other people did not see it too. And for my part, I wondered also. There was love written so clearly in her happy dreaming eyes, and joy painted so distinctly on her bright smooth cheeks, that whoso'er ran might read. No one did seem to care to read it however—more's the pity, perhaps.

It was written there plainly enough one sunshiny morning, as she sat on the sands gazing at the sea, grey in front and green behind, with the irregular white line of English coast faintly gleaming in the background, whilst Gladys played round her, building her castles, and looking a little wistfully at other master-builders who had workmen under them. She would have liked to join them, even as a hireling, but no one invited her. French children generally regard English children as unapproachable, and English folks, it

is well known, down to the last generation, have a natural distrust of one another.

"How fast they jog along," said Gladys the builder, striking work for a time, and looking back at Honor, who was sitting behind her, building *her* castles too. "It is just like the hearses coming back from a funeral."

"My dear little woman!" said Honor, startled, as the child's words fell across the thread of her own very pleasant private meditations and broke it. "What a dreadful comparison; and what is it that jogs along like a hearse?"

"Why the bathing-machines, of course. They r-rumble along over the sands, just like the hearses coming back from Kensal Gr-reen." (Gladys had just achieved pronouncing a French "r," and though it stuck like a burr on her tongue, she was not a little proud of the accomplishment). "I often see them going down St. Mark's

Road, when the funeral is over, and all the mutes sit outside among the feathers, and they talk together, and sometimes even laugh—and I always feel so sorry for the poor dead person they have left behind in a hole. It would be much nicer to be buried in the sea, I think,” continued the child, musingly. “The sand would be so soft and nice to lie on, and the waves overhead would sound like church-bells tolling, and——”

“What nonsense you are talking, Gladys,” said Honor, rather sharply. It seemed to her, somehow, that a cloud had suddenly gone over the sun.

“Well, perhaps I am,” admitted Gladys, candidly, “but even nonsense is better than nothing at all, and you never speak at all now, Honor.”

“Don’t I, darling?” said Honor, with a sudden rush of compunction. Had she then been so selfish, thinking her own thoughts and neglecting her little sister,

and had the child found it out before she had done so herself? "Come then, we will make up for lost time now," she said. "Shall I tell you a story, or would you like to go into the town and look at the shops?"

The child, who found a strange attraction in the narrow streets, full of funny shops and bustling people, who clattered about in their wooden shoes and stared at them as they passed, instantly chose the latter proposal. She picked up her spade and her basket of shells, and Honor threw her thoughts to the winds, and off the sisters started, arm-in-arm, as their way was.

It was nearly mid-day, and the streets were very hot, and the air still and windless. Everything seemed to be asleep in the sun, the old women under their umbrellas, the dogs on the door-steps, the flies on the cakes and creams in the window of the *patissier*. Even the gleaming grey

water, lapping lazily against the wet wooden beams of the little harbour, sang a sort of irresistible lullaby, as it rocked the small brown fishing-craft that lay slumbering on its breast. One boat, indeed, braver than the rest, had spread her brown sails, and set off confidently in the hope that at high tide a wind might arise and drive her out to sea.

But she had only drifted a little way across the harbour, and there she was now, hovering over the shining waters, like a brown butterfly pinned on to a sheet of paper. The rest of her companions, less venturesome, remained huddled together in a corner of the harbour, where they looked indeed like

“Dead flies, well nigh stagnated.”

“Oh! how hot it is,” said Gladys, almost panting.

They turned down the next street. It

was a sort of passage, dingy and therefore shady.

"If we go along here, and then up those steps at the end," said the child, looking round and recognizing her whereabouts, "we shall go past Lili's house. Do let us do that, Honor."

Honor prepared to do it, of course. She always obeyed the little one implicitly.

"But who is Lili?" she asked.

"Oh, don't you know Lili—Rosaline's niece," cried Gladys, communicatively. "She comes to our kitchen sometimes, and Rosaline always gives her a big basket to carry away with her. Her mother is a fish-wife, and she has two little brothers called Hyacinthe and Viollet. And they live in such a funny little house, and they always keep their door wide open."

They had reached the top of the steps, whilst Gladys was detailing all this valuable information. A steep street now rose before them, paved with large round

slippery stones, and bounded by houses so high and narrow that they seemed almost to meet at the top, like trees in an avenue. All of them seemed, too, to follow the fashion of Lili's house in the matter of open doors. Perhaps, on the whole, this was fortunate, as it gave the casual passer-by an opportunity of inspecting the most ordinary and domestic occupations of the dwellers within, and of ascertaining, by the use of his eyes, that these avocations were not exclusively connected with stale fish, as he might otherwise have imagined by means of another sense.

For this was Mont St. Michel, the fishing suburb of Pierreport, and here, amid clouds of brown nets, and gusts of fishy smells, the *matelots* and *matelottes* with their teeming families did love to dwell.

"Here come Lili and her mother," cried Gladys; as a short, stout woman in

a black petticoat, and a tight white cap tied under her chin, with a little girl dressed exactly like her holding on to her skirts, came clattering down the street in their big wooden shoes.

Gladys ran forward to meet them with outstretched hand and beaming face. But the fish-wife either did not or would not see the English child; she looked resolutely on the other side, and went on clattering faster and faster, and louder and louder. The little girl peeped out of one of her eyes at Gladys, and grinned a little greeting; but her hand being in her mother's she was dragged quickly on. Gladys fell back disappointed.

"They don't seem to know me," she said, in an aggrieved tone of voice. And then she looked up at Honor, expecting some sympathy—which, for once in her life, she did not get.



CHAPTER IX.

AN AWKWARD MEETING.

"Singing : and as the sweet voice of a bird,
Heard by the lander in a lonely isle,
Moves him to think what kind of bird it is
That sings so delicately clear, and make
Conjecture of the plumage and the form ;
So the sweet voice of Enid moved Geraint.
. Who thought and said,
'Here, by God's grace, is the one voice for me.' "

TENNYSON.

HONOR had grown dreamy and meditative again, and Gladys was thinking of her own wrongs with regard to Lili, so the pair walked on in silence for some time.

Honor was rather troubled in her mind. She did not like the notion of an acquaintanceship between Gladys

and Rosaline's niece; but she did not know how to prevent it. Rosaline, who was a fine-looking woman, with black eyes, and gold earrings, and an apparently unlimited supply of crisp white caps, was not a person to be spoken lightly to. Moreover she was not even the Carmichaels' own servant, but had merely passed into their service for the time being, together with the church, and the chaplain's rooms in the Rue Bon Secours. And the chaplain himself would as soon have thought of finding fault with the shape of his church windows, as Honor of objecting to anything hitherto done by the immaculate Rosaline. Nevertheless she felt rather uneasy.

Meanwhile the sisters had been clambering slowly up the steep slanting street, which widened gradually as they mounted. It opened out at last on an old grey church, standing alone on the top of the hill, with a borderland of churchyard

straggling up after it, and a pretty green landscape stretching out beyond. The church was full of votive offerings, silver hearts, and crosses, and model boats with quaint touching inscriptions appended to them. It was the fisherman's church; within its walls simple, faithful women were wont to kneel with streaming eyes and agonized hearts, when their "men" went away from them; and before its altar they would bring their thank-offerings when those dear ones, their fathers, husbands, brothers, lovers returned in safety from the dangers of the deep. The church was called St. Michel.

But the sisters did not go in to inspect these offerings. They lingered for a moment at the churchyard gate, and looked out over the tombs at the pretty far-stretching country beyond. There was a wood in the background, and a white shining road leading towards it; in front there were some fields full of

waving wheat, and a windmill or two, set here and there as if to remind the corn of its approaching destiny. And then just before them wound an enticing-looking lane, cool and shady, and bounded by high green hedgerows, down which Queen Gladys immediately elected to go.

But the hedgerows, alas ! were gay deceivers, and only existed for a very short way down the lane. When they came to an end, the sisters found themselves walking on a bare bleak bit of road, cut apparently out of the very edge of the hill. On one side there was a steep white path, half cut into steps, winding away like a serpent through the bushes and down to the shore ; on the other, rose a row of stiff small houses in various stages of erection. It was evidently new ground they had chanced upon—a place full of possibilities ; but devoid as yet of interest or association.

Most of these houses were mere shells

—protoplasms of dwelling places, filled with dust, instead of human beings. One house, however, seemed to be both finished and occupied. It was a small house just like the rest, with green *jalousies*, and a tiny flowerless garden in front. Its *jalousies* were open, and so were the windows, and through the space, sunwarmed, sunlighted, a stream of music came floating out, drifting over the little dreary garden, and flooding the narrow dingy lane.

The music was a voice—a young girl's voice, pure and clear as well-water, but rich and luscious withal; and the song that she sang was that song of Madame Amable Tastu's, which is so full of sorrow, and so void of suffering.

“ O monde ! ô vie, ô temps, fantômes, ombres vaines,
Qui laissez à la fin, mes pas irrésolus ;
Quand reviendront ces jours, où vos mains étaient
pleines,
Vos regards carressants, vos promesses certaines,
Jamais, ô jamais plus ! ”

"Is that good singing?" asked Gladys, who though a chorister of St. Mark's, entertained but a poor opinion of her own performances. "I don't like it at all," she added, shaking her golden head, and laughing.

Honor laughed too—a little low strange sort of laugh, that had somehow the shadow of shudder trembling through it. But she did not answer the child.

They walked on, nearing the house with the open windows, and looking up at it as they approached. The houses were numbered already, and this one was marked No. IV., but No. IV. of what—*rue—passage—avenue*, neither Honor nor Gladys had the least idea. They learnt to know it well enough though; one of them indeed far too well, before those Pierreport days were over.

Suddenly the house-door of No. IV. opened, letting out a fresh burst of music and two gentlemen as well, who stood for

a moment on the threshold talking together. Then they strolled leisurely down the garden-way, unlatched the gate, and went out into the lane.

“How she *zings*!” said one of them in good, round, vibrating, Teutonic English, as he passed the sisters. He was walking along with his face upturned, and his soul far away from his body, and being somewhat clumsy as well as exceedingly bulky, he rolled up against little Gladys, and nearly knocked her over. “Ah! *entschuldigung*,” he said, setting the child straight with his big hands. And then with a heavy sigh, as if drawn out of the depths of an unfathomable heart, he added to his companion: “It is just like all the angels, her *zinging*.”

His companion laughed in a strange grating way. He was considerably older than the other, and could not naturally be expected to express such raptures.

“Yes—she sings well enough,” he

returned carelessly, and in unmistakable English. "Not indeed so well as——" with a sigh too, which he checked instantly, as he checked his words, "I mean not altogether after the manner of the angels, as perhaps you will find out for yourself some day, Herr Graf."

Herr Graf rubbed his hands, and looked as if he had received the most acceptable compliment in the world. He was one of those big, blue-eyed, blundering fellows, with fair curly hair, round rosy cheeks, and a hesitating uncertain way of moving and speaking, such as Nature turns out by the bushel in all countries, and from which the great Fatherland is certainly not exempt. They are usually men of one idea, frank, foolish, faithful, with a peculiar knack of tumbling into scrapes, and an honest way of scrambling out of them. They are weak, and easily led both to good and to evil; they suffer keenly sometimes, but they do not

suffer long, and on the whole they lead lives as happy and worthy as it is given to mortals with good consciences, and humble hopes for the future, to enjoy here.

The Graf's companion was a very different looking man. He was tall and slight, with something of the *ancien mousquetaire* in his manner and bearing. He had deep-set steel-coloured eyes, and a heavy grey moustache. His hair was streaked with grey too, and his nose was gracefully hooked—not irregularly peaked after the fashion of Mr. Punch or *Napoléon Trois*, but with that true aristocratic look with which a beneficent providence has gifted some of our noblemen, in order, no doubt, that humbler folks might be enabled to hang up their hats upon them. He was English undoubtedly, and yet his clothes had a decided foreign cut. From his looks he might have been a Duke ; he was in truth

an Earl's son, and a man of certain age and standing, and yet he seemed to be paying immense deference to the mean-looking boyish German by his side.

Meanwhile the sisters had wandered on down the lane, which by this time had begun to turn and twist about like a wriggling wounded worm. The white path down to the sea seemed to have lost itself in a tangle of furze-bushes. The unfinished houses had come to an abrupt termination; and over the hedges and the piles of rubbish, the singing girl's voice drifted faintly and plaintively, like a far-away bell at sea. Another sudden bend, another sharp curve; the road was growing narrower and rougher with each step—and then, lo and behold it ended altogether, in two walls of mud and a damp-looking field.

Alas! it is not only country lanes which end like this. There have been many and many a bright beginning in

this world of ours, whose progress has been checked by the mire of sloth and indolence, or choked up by stones rolled against it by envious and ungrateful hands. For life is one long battle; and all our forces are useless—our armies of energy, and thought, and hope, fight in vain—unless we set out with a vanguard of sappers and miners, prepared to throw down as well as uprear.

“I suppose we must go back,” said Honor, surveying rather ruefully the perspective of mud, stretching out like a dim dark sea before her. “I think those steps will take us down to the shore, and if so, we can go home that way.”

“But if so, we shall have to go back, and pass that stupid awkward man again, who tumbled up against me just now,” objected Gladys, rubbing an imaginary injured shoulder.

What else was to be done? The muddy

field and the stile led apparently nowhere, except perhaps to one or two black-looking cottages in the distance; the winding path most likely went down to the shore. After a moment's consideration, the sisters turned back.

Gladys' injurer was still ambling up and down in front of the house with the open windows. His head was still upturned, his soul had evidently not yet returned to its body, or, to speak more correctly, his heart to its home. He was alone. His companion had disappeared. From the other end of the lane, the figure of a woman was seen approaching.

"Why—here comes Madame Pléon," said Gladys, making out the figure as it drew nearer.

"And who is Madame Pléon?" inquired Honor, "you seem to know everybody hereabouts, Queenie."

"Madame Pléon is a sort of head bathing-woman," explained Gladys. "She calls

herself the superintendent of the ladies who bathe, and she is always on the beach every morning till one o'clock. I saw her there to-day; but it was at Lili's house that I saw her first," added the child, preparing for a meeting and a greeting.

Madame Pléon, however, was not equally prepared on this occasion. Her head was turned away, not in the direction of the singing voice, but towards the steps and the winding path. There must have been something very interesting to her in that spot, for she crossed the road suddenly and looked again. She was a tall handsome woman of about forty years of age, well-dressed in a costume that was half *paysanne* and half *bourgeoise*. She carried a basket under her arm—a flat open basket, with no handle and no cover, and containing probably her marketings for the week.

The basket was full to the brim. There were all sorts of miscellaneous articles in it,

from a pair of *sabots* to a fine fat *oison*, such as it would have gladdened the heart of good King Henry to see in a house-wife's hands. All the things lay loosely huddled together, and Madame Pléon carried the basket, which was a wide one, by merely stretching her arm across it.

And so it chanced that Herr Graf, backing slowly with his eyes upturned towards *Maison Numéro quatre*; and Madame, walking towards him rapidly, but looking in the other direction, came into sudden and unexpected collision. The basket and its contents were upset, and Honor and Gladys, who happened to be passing at the precise moment, seemed to be somehow mixed up in all the confusion.

Herr Graf was profuse in his apologies. He poured out a torrent of *entschuldigungs*. He bowed and scraped indiscriminately to Honor and to Madame Pléon. He stroked the *oison* in the most paternal manner. When order was once

more restored, however, his head resumed its slanting position, his face its rapt expression. The sisters and Madame Pléon went their way, each in a different direction, and left him standing before the house.

“What a very awkward, clumsy man!” said Gladys, feeling somehow as though her suspicions with regard to her shoulder had been justified. “And see, there is a letter lying on the ground. That must have dropped out of the basket, too.”

The child began running back, but at that moment the Graf also caught sight of the letter, and picked it up, and brought it to Honor.

“Is it yours, Mademoiselle?” he asked.

Honor shook her head. The letter was addressed to Madame Pléon, but there was no other direction on it. The Graf glanced at it too.

He started as he read the direction. “Madame Pléon!” he repeated, in a won-

dering tone. And then he stared at the words again, and then he looked at Honor as though he half expected her to explain some mystery to him (it was strange how instinctively even strangers would turn to that sweet grave face for help or advice), and then he took to his heels, and, fat and burly as he was, seemed absolutely to fly after Madame Pléon.

"Are you not coming, Reichenau?" cried his late companion, suddenly shooting up his head above the steps. "We shall miss the train unless you make haste."

"One little moment," panted the Graf, still on the track of Madame Pléon. "One little moment, good friend, I will be with you."

The Graf's little moment, however, turned out to be a long one—so long, indeed, that Honor and Gladys had time to walk to the end of the lane and back again before he had concluded his conver-

sation with Madame Pléon. He turned away at last, but he still looked very much excited, and was writing down something in his pocket-book as he came along. He did not even pause to give one lingering look to *Maison Numéro quatre*, but went quickly down the steps and rejoined his companion. They hurried on together, and Honor and Gladys following, could see their black heads bobbing in and out of the winding-path, till at last they disappeared in a curve of the road that led to the town.

The sisters walked on slowly. They could not hear the music any longer. It was all very still and quiet in that lonely path among the furze-bushes.

Suddenly—behind them—there was a rush, a flutter, a sound such as the waves make when they suck in their foamy lips and run back from the shore to the sea ; and something dashed past them—something in a blue dress, like a bit of Italian

sky, something with a lovely flushed face, and gleaming grey eyes, and rough brown hair curling in a sort of crop, under rather a shabby hat.

"That was the girl who was singing, I am sure," said Gladys sagaciously. "And oh, Honor, did you see the holes in her boots?"

"My dear little woman, you must not always be looking out for holes in other people," replies Honor rather sententiously. "But come now, let us see how fast we can run down this last flight of steps."

"Are we late, then?" asked Gladys, looking up into her sister's face with what Rosaline would call a *sourire fin*. "Or are you expecting Stephen?"





CHAPTER X.

A STILL MORE AWKWARD MEETING.

"Just saved, without pulse or breath,
Scarcely saved from the gulp of death."

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

IF Honor had been expecting Stephen she was doomed to disappointment; and I hope she committed to memory, before breakfast next morning, that soothing text: "He that expecteth nothing, shall not be greatly disappointed."

Now that I have written this down,

however, I am not quite sure that I approve of the sentiment. Are not the most melancholy and disappointed people in the world just those who tell you with a sigh, that "they never expect anything good or pleasant to happen to *them*." And does not expectancy contain half, and a good half too, of the delights of life? The bird that is winging his way towards us is a far finer fellow, sings more sweetly, flies more fleetly, than any amount of tame house-birds we may hold in our hands. If, when he comes and nestles in our bosoms at last, he turns out to be but of a common species after all, what does that matter? We have, at least, had the felicity of imagining him beautiful. It is better to expect something pleasant, even if one is disappointed in the end, than never to expect anything at all, or only something disagreeable. At any rate, one has had the pleasure of anticipation.

The morning after that meeting in the lane rose bright and beautiful, which was lucky, as an event which had been looked forward to for some days was about to take place. Gladys was to bathe for the first time in her life. It was an event which was remembered for many and many a long year after.

The child woke early, almost before the sun, and long before the nuns in the convent opposite had begun to chant their prime, or the milk-women and their donkeys to tramp through the streets with their clinking cans. But Honor did not wake so soon, nor, indeed, at all, till little Gladys, in her eager excitement, roused her with a kiss. Then she woke smiling. Perhaps—who knows?—she had been dreaming of her bird.

The sisters were early down on the beach, but a good many other people were earlier still. They had to wait some time before their turn came. They

were not much to be pitied, however, for it was a lovely morning, as I have already remarked. The air was sharp like salt, and "strong like wine." There was a briskness, a keenness, a sort of metallic brightness everywhere that was very exhilarating. The sun shone like a king's face, and the wind, salt-tasted too, curled Gladys' golden hair, and wrinkled the crests of the waves as they ran races along the shore. Overhead, the sky was full of shifting colours, subtle and sweet, while the sea, catching here and there broken reflections of broken beams, glittered and gleamed like a field ablaze with fire-flies.

Honor, sitting on the shining sands, with her hands clasped round her knees, and her sweet blue eyes straying far away over the waves and the waters, to yonder faint grey cliffs of England, thought she could have looked at these things for ever. She really had quite a

passionate love for the sea. It had divided her from Stephen, it is true, but it seemed to connect them, too. He on that side, and she on this, and the waves moving between them like winged messengers of love. Honor, you see, had learnt to be fanciful and poetical, since she had been in love.

Gladys, however, was of quite a different opinion, and thoroughly agreed in the sentiments of Madame Pléon, who was standing on the beach beside her.

“Ah! *petite dame*, it is weary work, waiting, *n'est-ce pas?*” she said, looking down, and addressing the child with that perfect mixture of familiarity and respect which Southern people know so well how to blend. “But *courage*, it is a work one must needs get used to, if one means to tarry long in this world of ours.” And her dark face softened into a smile, as she looked down again at the pretty, impatient, restless child.

There was some mystery about Madame Pléon. Some of the Pierreport people shook their heads when they spoke of her: others looked after her with a sort of wondering curiosity. She was not of their town, that was clear. She was from the South, by her speech. She lived in a little lonely cottage beyond Mont St. Michel. She had but few visitors, for she was not sociably inclined. She was reputed to have performed some miracles of swimming, and to be in possession of various medals presented to her by various Humane Societies. She hated the sound of an English voice, and the sight of an English face, and that was about all that was known of her.

There was always a tolerably large English colony at Pierreport, so Madame Pléon had ample opportunities of exercising her feelings towards that nation. She could be impartial in the matter of

machines, but, Frenchwoman as she was, she could not pretend to be polite. She hated *la perfide Albion* with an absurd, old-fashioned, unreasonable sort of hate.

And yet, here she is, this sunshiny morning, smothering her feelings, and wasting her time in talking to a little yellow-haired English child, who sits on the sands at her feet, and looks up at her with wondering brown eyes. Such a thing has never happened before. Françette, the bathing woman, and Antoine, the driver, look on in surprise. In truth, it was almost a mystery to Madame Pléon herself. Nevertheless, she seemed disposed to brave public opinion.

"Some of those people in the sea are thy *compatriotes, petite*," she said, in that deep-toned voice of hers, which was as unlike the sharp shrill voices of the people round, as a flute is unlike a penny whistle. "They are foolish *à faire peur*,

but they swim like fishes, that must be allowed. But then, the time they remain in the sea, *c'est incroyable*. *Figurez-vous, Mademoiselle,*" (this was addressed with great politeness to Honor, who was not listening at all, but was still gazing at the faint line of English coast,) "there is one *jeune dame* yonder who has been in the sea for more than an hour. She is amusing herself, and does not think of those who wait on shore for her machine. Oh, yes, she is English, *pour bien sûr*. It is only the English who are thus selfish and greedy. But stay, we will have a revenge. Her machine shall be drawn up out of the water, and *Mademoiselle la nageuse* shall have the felicity of swimming to shore."

Madame Pléon's revenge was speedily accomplished, and a few minutes later Honor and Gladys found themselves reeling and rattling over the sands, in a dark, dripping, jolting machine.

"Is it rough?" asked Gladys, as with a mighty lurch the vehicle came to a full stop.

"Rough—oh no, dear! it is not at all rough," replied Honor, peeping out. "And, oh! Gladys, there is a lady over there swimming so beautifully. I wonder whether she can be the English lady Madame Pléon was telling us about just now?"

"Let *me* see," said Gladys importantly. "Yes, she does swim well. Can you swim, Honor?"

Honor shook her head, and confessed she was minus that accomplishment.

"No? what a pity!" continued Gladys. "But I tell you what *you* could do, Honor. You are so tall you could easily stand upright where that lady is swimming. And that would do quite as well, you know, for then if I were drowning, you could stoop down and pick me up; could you not, Honor?"

"I don't know, dear. I don't want to make the experiment upon you." And the clear sweet eyes dimmed at the very thought.

The next moment, the sisters were dashing and splashing about in the water, like the merriest of merry mermaids.

The swimming lady still attracted Gladys' attention.

"Hark—she is singing now. Let us go up nearer, and listen."

"No, no, Queenie, it is time for you to go in," said the prudent elder sister. "Besides, it is rude to stare at people, you know."

"Perhaps she would like it," suggested Gladys. "And—listen—Honor. Don't you hear? she is singing the same song that the lady sang in the lane yesterday. *Jamais, ô jamais plus*. I can hear the words quite plainly. And it is, yes, it is," she added, wriggling herself round in Honor's arms, to get a better view of the

swimmer, "it *is* the same lady who flew past us yesterday. I can see her eyes, they are so curiously bright—just like polished steel—and—and just see how funnily she is going now, Honor—all on one side—do look."

Honor did look, but she saw nothing; for just at that moment the object of Gladys' admiration ducked her head under a wave.

"She is only amusing herself, dear," said Honor. And then lifted the child up in her arms, and set the little white feet on the green slimy slippery steps of the machine.

"I don't think she is, though," returned the child, with her face still turned towards the sea. "Her hands are trembling so—and—oh Honor what's *that*?" cried Gladys with a shudder, as a sharp shrill cry rang out across the water.

Honor heard it too, and looked round again. She saw two white arms flung

For a second, Honor stood still as if breathing a sigh, or a prayer. Then with a wild step forward, a desperate plunge through the maddening waters, she threw herself down—down—till her lips meet the cold lips under the sea, and her fingers are caught in a web of drenched drowned hair.

And after that she remembered nothing more.

The waves buoy her up again, drive her back a little. Her feet find their footing; her lips open once more to inhale the sweet breath of heaven; she stands erect for a second, with a girl's dead, or exhausted, form tightly caught within her arms—but she knows nothing at all about it.

She pushes the wet hair off her brow. She shudders and shakes in every limb. She looks round wildly once.

Then, slowly her eyes seem to close again—the waves begin to gurgle like

burial-bells in her ears—and the sand—
is it the sand? flutters across her cheek,
and falls like angels' kisses upon her
lips.





CHAPTER XI.

ÉCUME DE MER

"The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,
And these are of them."

MACBETH.

WHEN Honor opened her eyes once more, she was lying, not under the sea, but on the sandy wooden floor of the comfortless machine.

The angels were all gone, except Gladys, who was kissing her sister's cold, clammy fingers, and Madame Pléon, who if not much like an angel, was at least a ministering spirit, employed at that moment in pouring something warm and

life-restoring down the half-drowned girl's throat.

But life, just then, seemed a long way off to Honor Carmichael, and scarcely worth the trouble of travelling back to. She looked round slowly once, as if bidding good-bye to all things near, and then closed her eyes again. One of her attendant spirits was in despair.

"Oh, Honor—Honor, don't keep your eyes shut like that. I don't like it. Don't you hear, Honor? Gladys does not like it."

Honor did hear, but she could not say so just then. Nor could she quite open her eyes again. But she opened her arms, stretching them out a little wildly, a little uncertainly, and that did as well. The child flew into them, and lay curled up on her sister's breast, like a folded flower at sunset.

Madame Pléon looked at them, till her bright black eyes grew quite dim and misty. "There were other sisters once,"

she murmured to herself, "who loved like these; and yet *they* were parted." Then she opened the door quietly, and disappeared.

By-and-by Honor's memory began to tingle once more (her throat had been on fire for some time past), and shaking herself up to a sitting position, she rubbed her eyes vigorously, and said in quite her usual voice, "Where is she?"

"Oh, I don't know, Honor, dear," cried Gladys, plunging and kicking with delight at seeing the loving blue eyes wide open once more. "A big wave went over you, you know, and then Madame Pléon and Antoine rushed into the sea, and picked you up, and another lady too. And Madame Pléon brought you in here, and Antoine carried the lady away somewhere else. And a lady on the beach said you were so brave, and ought to have a medal. But I did not care about your being brave. Your eyes

were close shut, and your face was so white, and oh ! I was so frightened."

"Were you, my darling—I am so sorry," said Honor, winding her arms closer round the little one. "But it's all right now, you see," (a very big loving stare) "only I should like to know how the lady is—"

"Oh, she does well, à merveille, allez," answered Madame Pléon returning, and speaking in that comic sandwich sort of language (one word of English between two of French), which she had arranged and composed expressly for the benefit of the bathers. "We send for *M. le médecin* ; but before he arrives, I rub *la jeune personne* back to life. *Et vous, mon enfant* ? how do you ? *dites donc* ?"

"Oh, I am all right," answers Honor cheerfully, testifying to the same, by working away rapidly at the completion of her toilet.

"All right—that's all right," returns

the Frenchwoman. "I always say there is nothing like that blessed *eau-de-vie*. But are you really able to walk, *chère mees*?" she added, somewhat anxiously, as she saw Honor making for the door.

"If I could not, it would be the fault of your blessed *eau-de-vie*, I should think," replies Honor, laughing. And then she goes down the machine steps, perhaps a trifle more carefully than usual, and waits on the sands for Madame Pléon.

"Are you going back to see that lady now?" she asks, as the Frenchwoman joins her. "Because if you are, I should like to go with you—that is if it would not be intruding?"

Madame Pléon stands still for a moment, and looks at her a little doubtfully.

"Intruding—*non, ce n'est pas ça*," she says hesitating. "But you see, I do not know, I am not acquainted with this young lady, and I am not quite sure

whether I ought to present her to you, Mademoiselle."

"I should not have thought, under the circumstances, that an introduction was necessary," says Honor, laughing at Madame Pléon's *comme il faut* scruples, and feeling rather excited by the mysterious manner in which she had spoken.

Madame Pléon, however, was not accustomed to being laughed at. She did not understand it; French people seldom do; and she was rather disposed to take offence.

"Come," she said, captiously. "It is no business of mine. I do not know who you are that I should care, except that you have a look in your eyes that reminds me a little—of some one I once knew. As for the other young lady," (with a shrug) "*je n'en sais rien*, either. True, I have eyes, and ears, and a memory too, and doubtless *le bon Dieu* does not give us these things for nothing. Still, seeing

and hearing, and even remembering, that is *autre chose* from knowing. But come now, here we are arrived at the little *pavillon*," she continued, rejecting the shower of apologies and thanks with which Honor proposed appeasing her injured feelings. "*Entrez toujours, Mademoiselle, la petite restera dehors un petit moment.*"

Mademoiselle la petite somewhat objected, but on being assured by Honor, it would "really be only a *petit moment*," she consented to wait outside in the sunshine, and admire Antoine's exploits among the machines.

Honor followed Madame Pléon through the open door of the gaily-painted *pavillon*, and along a narrow corridor, lined with bathing-dresses, and bladder-like caps set out to dry. She was feeling rather excited. Something new and strange was certainly going to happen to her. Hitherto her life had been so quiet, so monotonous, a natural succession of

seasons, nothing more. Things had grown up beside her as a tree grows. Nothing ever seemed to happen unexpectedly. Even Stephen's love, like Gladys' life, was to her, but as the summer flower of the spring-tide bud; the tree had blossomed, the flower had unfolded; it was very sweet—very beautiful—that was all.

They had reached Madame Pléon's little business room by this time. Honor looked round curiously. There was the lady superintendant's *comptoir*, with her papers still scattered about, and on a table in the corner the remains of the *déjeuner*, from which she had been ruthlessly called away by a cry on the beach. In another corner there was a pile of blankets heaped up against the wall, on which, rude and slanting couch a young girl was reclining.

The girl looked up as her visitors entered, but said nothing. She was very young evidently, and she looked at that

moment, perhaps, younger than she really was. Her feet were curled up under her; her hair fell in a matted mass over her shoulders: Her face was very pale, and her whole attitude like that of a tired child; nevertheless, by the gleam of the grey eyes and the sheen of her blue dress, Honor recognized at once the bright-faced girl who had shot past her, like summer lightning, yesterday morning.

“Mademoiselle,” said Madame Pléon to the girl on the blankets—she had undertaken to do the honours, but she was not going to do them with a very good grace—“here is the noble young English lady, who by the aid of the Blessed Virgin and all the saints, saved the life of Mademoiselle half-an-hour ago.”

The grey eyes of Mademoiselle glanced up quickly, then down again; but her lips said nothing.

“Surely,” continued Madame Pléon, still in her position of mistress of the

ceremonies, "Mademoiselle cannot mean to leave unthanked the young lady to whom she owes so much."

Thus urged the girl opened her lips, though she did not look up again.

"Mademoiselle," she said in French, "permit me to express to you my thanks for having saved a life which is not of the smallest value to anyone."

"Surely that is not true," said Honor, startled by the strangeness of the speech.

"Mademoiselle knows best," said Madame Pléon, shrugging her old shoulders again and staring hard at the girl. Then she picked up a bundle of bathing-dresses and left the room.

Honor stood still a moment, uncertain whether to follow her, or to pursue her acquaintance with the girl on the floor.

The latter settled the matter.

"Is she gone?" she asked in English, clasping her hands behind her head, and looking up at Honor with a quaint, comic

expression on her face. "*Dieu soit béni!* Come and sit here on this pile of bathing-dresses—faugh! how they smell of the sea—and let me tell you that I did not mean to be rude or ungracious to *you*."

The emphasis was flattering. A pretty appealing smile had succeeded the mocking impish look, and Honor, as she took her seat on the pile of bathing-dresses, could not help feeling that the world was the richer for her morning's work, or rather, that it would have been the poorer had those eyes and lips, and that dainty little figure altogether been still lying mute and motionless beneath the waves.

"I always make a point of being rude to old Pléon on principle," continued the girl. "She hates me so, you know," she added, as if in explanation of the principle.

"She does not like English people, I have heard," said Honor, trying to put a mild face on the matter.

"Oh, but she has some especial and particular hate for me," returned the girl, with a strange grating sort of laugh. "I do not know the reason of it, but I found it out before we had been here a month. And when people hate one without a cause, one may as well give them a reason for doing so, I think."

Honor was puzzled by the rapid changes in the girl's manner. They were so quick and sudden, it seemed almost impossible to follow them.

"You do not live here then?" she said,

"Live here! no, I should hope not. I loathe and detest the place. But we have been here a couple of months already, and I cannot think why my father stays on. We do not generally remain so long in any place."

"Where do you live, then?" asked Honor. And the moment she had asked the question she thought it was, perhaps, rather an impertinent one.

"I don't live anywhere," replied the girl, abruptly. "I have no home."

There was something so startling and sad in the way in which the girl's voice sank from its sharp, defiant, single notes, to a plaintive pathetic chord, full of many tones of feeling, that Honor's heart was touched. She was more sorry than ever that she had asked the question.

"What are you looking so melancholy about?" said the girl, pushing up her little bright chin after a moment's pause, and peering sharply into Honor's face. "Don't think that *I* want a home. What, one of your dull English homes," she cried, letting her voice run up again, till its glad high notes rang out like a peal of bells, "where the father talks about the weather all day long; and the mother scolds her maids, and the girls mend their stockings, and the boys run away for very dullness—*merci!* I don't think that sort of life would suit me. Is it yours?"

"Not quite," replied Honor, laughing. "I mend my stockings certainly, but I have no mother and no brothers. I have only one little sister to take care of, and my father never talks about the weather, and very seldom about anything else."

"Oh! how dreadful—are you not alarmed about him?" said the other, laughing too. "And a little sister to take care of" (repeating Honor's words in her quaint Frenchified English). "Is not that a trouble?"

"A trouble! Gladys a trouble?" says Honor, indignant as any mother. "Ah! you do not know—you have never seen her. And I must go now," she added, rising, "she is waiting for me outside."

"Oh, do not go yet," said the other, rising also off her pile of blankets, and shaking her hair back from her forehead, till it fell in a bright rippling stream all over her shoulders, and far down below her waist. "Do not go yet—I *have* seen

her, and I saw you, too, yesterday in the lane beyond Mont St. Michel. But I did not understand, because I have no one to care for me ; no one to care about myself. I cannot tell what it would feel like. I am all alone."

"All alone !" repeated Honor, gently. "I am so sorry for you. But surely you have some friends ?"

"I have my father," replied the girl, briefly. "I have no friends. That was my father you passed in the lane yesterday," she continued, after a pause, during which Honor remained silent and thoughtful. "I knew you again the moment you came into the room. You have a look in your eyes that one does not easily forget—a sort of restful look, as though, here and there, some poor tired souls had leant against yours and found peace. Is that so?" she asked, with a sudden change of voice. "Or has the look only grown into your

face through having had to rock the little sister so often to sleep?"

Honor remained silent. There was a sort of half-mocking, half-plaintive ring in the girl's voice, which she could not understand. Was she laughing at her, or envying her?

"That was my father," continued the girl, slowly, watching Honor. "He is English. My mother was a Frenchwoman. I cannot remember her, she died twelve years ago, when I was six years old. My name is Valentine Murray; what is yours?"

"Honor Carmichael," said our gentle Honor, softly. And then, the thought of the time when it should be Honor Something-else came rushing across her mind, and she blushed all over, and trembled a little, and her eyelids quivered and fell, like little drifting white clouds across the misty blue sky of her eyes.

Valentine Murray watched her as if it might be some curious book into which she was glancing.

"What are you thinking of?" she asked, abruptly.

The question brought Honor back with a leap out of the past into the present, and sent her thoughts flying out of her own life into that of the girl by her side. How lonely it must be, how poor, and thin, and miserable! how different to her own, which was so full and rich with many sorts of love! Could she not spare her some little scrap out of her great abundance? What is the use of being rich, if one can never give away anything?

"I am thinking," she said, very softly, and stammering a little, "that it must be terribly sad to be so much alone as you say you are; but if you like—that is, if you choose, you need be so no longer. For I think God must have in-

tended us to become friends, you and I, and so let us meet this morning in the sea."

Her voice trembled less as she went on; but she was very glad when her little speech was concluded. It was like making an offer of marriage, she thought. How dreadful it must be to be a man, and have to make such proposals to women! And then, supposing one was rejected?

There was no fear of rejection in this case, however. Valentine looked rather surprised; but far more pleased than surprised. She flung her arms round Honor's neck, (she was a little thing, and Honor was very tall; it was rather like a bear hugging a pole,) and kissed her with effusion.

"Will you really be my friend?" she cried. "I never had one before. How funny it seems; and a friend made in the sea too. *Ecume de mer*—is

that to be the emblem of our friendship?"

Honor turned away. Valentine was laughing again in that strange, mocking sort of way, which had already grated more than once upon her ears. There was certainly something rather tuneless about her, but no doubt that would vanish when they knew each other better. Meanwhile, it was perhaps as much Honor's fault as Valentine's, if they were not quite in tune at first. At least, so thought the honest, simple-minded, English girl.

At this moment the door opened suddenly, and Gladys came rushing in.

"Oh, Honor—Honor, what a long *petit moment* you have been! Are we never going home?" There was no lack of music about the child. She was a tune herself, a little tune all played in the treble, and with no bass notes at all, as yet.

The bass notes followed on the lips of Madame Pléon.

"I come to say," said that instrument, in its deep vibrating tones, "that Madame la Comtesse de M——, having witnessed the heroic conduct of *Mademoiselle l'anglaise* in the sea this morning, begs to have the honour of offering her carriage to take her and *Mademoiselle la presque-noyé* home."

"Oh! no—no," cried Honor. "I am quite well now, quite able to walk home, and come," she said, turning to Valentine, "are you not better also, and will you not walk up with Gladys and me?"

And so the trio started, and their friendship, doomed also to prove so fatal, was thus begun.





CHAPTER XII.

A CALENDAR OF FEASTS.

"It is a pleasure indeed to converse with this girl:
oh, rare gift !
Rare felicity, this ! She can talk in a rational way,
can
Speak upon subjects that really are makers of mind
and of thinking,
Yet in perfection retain her simplicity."

A. H. CLOUGH.



ALTHOUGH Honor had proposed with eager politeness that Miss Murray should accompany her home, she was not a little nervous as to the manner in which her father would be likely to receive an unexpected guest at his dinner-table. Such a thing had never happened before. Hospitality after

a certain kind, the Vicar indeed practised, that is, towards the curates and schoolmistresses of the parish, in the matter of teas, and also towards various beetle-browed professors, old cronies of his own, whose suppers taxed Honor's powers of ingenuity. But to the chance of "entertaining angels unawares," Mr. Carmichael had never given a thought.

Honor, accordingly, was not a little alarmed at her own audacity in making such an experiment.

"I am afraid papa will be late," she said, trying to prepare her friend's mind for a possible rebuff. "He is a very learned man, and is just now engaged in compiling a dictionary of dead languages, which occupies his thoughts a good deal. I believe his name is well known among *savants* in every country in Europe."

Miss Murray expressed the pleasure it would give her to make the acquaint-

ance of so distinguished a person. Her curiosity, at any rate, was excited.

"I shall feel frightened," she said. "I have never known any one so wonderfully clever." Which was true. The specimens of the nobler sex she had hitherto encountered, had certainly not been of the book-worm order.

All this flattering fear and pretty preparation, however, was wasted. Mr. Carmichael came in at last, but scarcely took any notice of his daughter's friend. He did not even seem surprised to see her, which was, to Miss Murray, perhaps the cruellest cut of all. The fact was, he was never surprised at anything. His mind being always so full, it could seldom manage to take in a single extra impression; and if Honor had invited a party of *matelotes* to dinner, or Gladys had brought home a menagerie of monkeys, he would, I think, have helped them

all round to soup, and then quietly subsided into his book.

Which was exactly what he did on the present occasion.

He came in hurriedly, with his book under his arm (a bilious-looking, brown-paper-clad customer it was, this time); listened to Honor's story in his usual breathless, inattentive sort of way, praised the girl's conduct in words few and common enough, in all truth, but which made her cheeks glow again; shook hands with Miss Murray, and then, sitting down to the table, had probably forgotten all about the matter before he had finished saying grace.

Dinners were always rather a solemn *fonction chez la famille Carmichael*, as Rosaline, in her capacity of parlour-maid which she assumed when her duties as cook were completed, used invariably to observe. And to-day, owing probably to the presence of a stranger-guest, that

meal proceeded even more silently. It was a sunny, sleepy afternoon. The *persiennes* were closed, but through their cracks a few lines of light came filtering and flickering over the shining floor and the white spread table.

The street was quiet. Every now and then the horses on the cab-stand opposite would fidget a little, and hit their iron-hoofs against the hot stone pavement; or their *cochers* would yawn uneasily, and flip their whips, and discourse to one another in a language composed apparently of nothing else but v.s. and s.s.; or a *matelote's* song of *sauterelles* would be uplifted shrilly, and die away into silence; or a child would cry, or a dog would bark, but other and more exhilarating sounds there were none without. And within, there was only a languid buzzing of flies, and a gentle murmur of knives and plates, and the *frôlement* of Rosaline's gown against the

floor, as she brought in her *plats*, one by one.

Miss Murray seemed to find this silence rather irksome. It was her knife and fork that discoursed most frequently, and if she could have made the flies buzz a little louder, I think she would have done so—anything to break the monotony of the feast. It was so dreadful to see that formidable old man reading away at the end of the table. If he was so clever, why did not he say something? She wanted him to speak to her, or at any rate to look at her. But he might as well have been deaf and dumb, and blind into the bargain, for all the notice he had taken of her.

She hazarded a remark at last. It was about the *fricandeau*, and she followed it up by sundry interesting observations concerning the cookery of various nations, to which Honor replied to the best of her ability. Gladys paid her the compli-

ment of staring at her while she spoke, and Rosaline stopped short in her perambulations round the table, to listen with evident relish to a description she was giving of the mode of feeding common to a certain Graf von Reichenau, who seemed to be a friend of her father.

"Raw ham, you know, and then blue trout and pink cabbage, mixed together, and all shoved down with a knife." But Mr. Carmichael took no notice of her witty remarks. Dinners and diners were evidently not in his line.

She must try some other subject.

"What a beautiful day it is," she began, conversationally, after a pause. "Have you been for a walk, Mr. Carmichael?"

Complete silence on the part of everybody. Mr. Carmichael takes no more notice of the clear silvery tones addressing him, than he does of the flies buzzing on the window-pane. A fact probably

more gratifying to the flies than to Miss Murray.

She repeats her remark, with the same result. Gladys begins to giggle a little. Honor interposes.

"I am afraid papa does not hear you," she says softly. "He is always so much engrossed with his book. Will you have some more *œufs à la neige*? It is one of Rosaline's famous dishes. I should think even your German friend would appreciate it."

Honor spoke apologetically, but she did not attempt to rouse her father from his studies. She continued her conversation with Valentine, however, chiefly upon culinary matters, and in a spasmodic sort of way, till finally it languished and faded away. Gladys, whose tongue usually wagged freely enough, sat mute and motionless as a china image.

"You are just like a china mandarin I once saw in a tea-shop," said Miss

Murray, still pursuing her idea of being funny, even if it were only in the infantile department. "It wagged its old head, and put out its old tongue, and made just about as many remarks as you have done. How would you like to be set up in a window to be looked at, little Gladys?"

Little Gladys, who scarcely understood what was being said to her, pursed up her mouth as if scoring down the insult to be answered at some future time; and then opening it again, contented herself with lolling out her tongue in the suggested fashion. But she said nothing. Valentine was baffled once more.

She was baffled merely, not beaten. In fact she was even at that moment preparing for another attack. It was clear that weather was no more within Mr. Carmichael's beat than cooking had been; indeed it was foolish of her to have wasted a second of time or

thought on the matter. Had not Honor warned her that her father never discussed such things? She must try something different, and try it in a different way.

"Is that German you are reading?" she asked suddenly, just as Mr. Carmichael began to turn over a fresh page of his strangely-lettered book. It was a good opportunity, and she seized it.

Mr. Carmichael looked up slowly from under his grave bent brows. Miss Murray's voice was a clear ringing one, and she had certainly spoken in season. By the bye, what gift in the world is there equal to this one of "speech in season?" otherwise called "choosing your opportunity." It is better than any amount of learning, or power, inasmuch as it is the pendulum of power, the balance of genius. It has in fact, an alchemical force of its own, and has been known to endue a fool with the appearance of wisdom, a

coward with the name of hero, an abandoned sinner with all the attributes of saintship; whereas impulses and instincts, however generous and true, often only mislead and betray their possessor. But this is only *par parenthèse*, as it were, and to draw attention to one of Miss Murray's most admirable qualities.

"This is a Greek book," said Mr. Carmichael, surveying her slowly, while the unturned page hovered for a moment between his finger and thumb.

Miss Murray gave a little gasp. She seemed to be suddenly filled with that breathless, boundless admiration which Molière's "*Femmes Savantes*" entertained towards a man who knew "*du grec, ma sœur*."

"It is a short history of St. Gregory the Illuminator, and a tolerably complete one; I borrowed it from the library here," continued Mr. Carmichael, still looking at her. It was very surprising, certainly, that

any one should take an interest in his studies ; but then there was no end to the marvels daily occurring at Pierreport ?

“ St. Gregory the Illuminator was the founder of the Armenian Church,” he went on, dropping off his items of information like pearls from a chaplet, “ and the Armenian Church is an offshoot of the Greek Church, which, as you are aware, is the established Church of Russia.”

Whether Miss Murray was aware of this theological fact, or not, is doubtful. But it did not matter, she had got her clue. That was all she wanted.

“ The ceremonies of the Russian Church are very interesting,” she said presently, as if she too were making an original and instructive remark.

“ Have you ever been in Russia ?” asked Mr. Carmichael, suddenly interested.

“ No, but I have known a great many Russians,” answered Valentine, promptly.

“ Ah !” says Mr. Carmichael, in a tone

of satisfaction. "And may I ask whether, from personal intercourse with them, you formed an impression that they will be the coming race with regard to literature, as well as politically the future rulers of the world?"

"They are certainly a wonderful people," replies Valentine, ready for any emergency, though a little bewildered by the political and æsthetic problem thus suddenly put before her. "There was a very clever Russian family we once met——"

Mr. Carmichael disposed himself to listen. The page fell back unturned.

But Miss Murray's clever Russians were only skilled in the matter of modern languages (a matter beneath the contempt of a learned man), and as the story had a tendency to drift towards Homburg, Mr. Carmichael forsook it on its road thither, turned over his page at last, and resumed his reading very contentedly.

Dinner was concluded by this time.

"I am afraid your father does not like me, dear," said Valentine to Honor, as they passed into the *salon* together. It was her nature to be rendered uneasy by the presence of a single crumpled leaf in her bed of roses.

"Oh, you must not think that," said Honor, quickly. "As I told you before, papa seldom speaks. He thinks too much to talk much. But I am sure he will like you when he knows you better. Everybody must do so."

And strange to say, Honor's prognostications on this point were correct.

That same evening at tea-time—(I am sorry to have to introduce you to another eating-scene, but the hours in English households are usually marked by repasts. It is a daily calendar of feasts—breakfast o'clock, dinner o'clock, &c., the time between being computed to or from these epochs)—at tea o'clock then that evening,

before he began to read, Mr. Carmichael remarked :—

“ That was a nice intelligent girl you brought home to-day, Honor. Above the average I should say.”

“ I don’t like her,” said Gladys briskly, shaking her little golden head. The child had been full of the visit they had all just paid to Madame Pléon, in her cottage beyond Mont St. Michel, and of the clock she had seen there, and the piece of charred wood which had fallen on Monsieur Pléon’s head and killed him, and all the rest of the wonders. Her tongue had gone on chattering in one unceasing stream, making up apparently for its silence at dinner time; but she stopped short now, and looking full at her father with her keen brown eyes, she repeated—
“ I don’t like her at all, and I don’t think Madame Pléon does either.”




CHAPTER XIII.

PULLING DOWN THE HEDGE.

"Love thy neighbour, yet pull not down thy hedge."

GEORGE HERBERT.

F Honor had been disposed at first to pity her friend's sad lot, and, indeed, had been chiefly drawn towards her out of a feeling of compassion for her lonely condition, as described by herself, she soon found reason to alter her opinion in that respect. Valentine to be pitied? No, indeed—envied rather, Honor thought. She was so bright, and beautiful, and clever. She could do what she liked all day long, and

as old Mademoiselle Madelon, her *dame de compagnie*, managed their *ménage*, she had no household cares to trouble her head, such as sometimes puckered the pretty brow of our Honor. She laid herself out to amuse others, which was a laudable away of amusing herself. It was pleasant to be in her company, and the Carmichaels soon enjoyed that privilege pretty often. In fact, they were all delighted with her.

Even Mr. Carmichael. He did not seem to take much notice of her, but he talked to her a good deal in his slow dreamy way. He lent her one of his books to read, which astonished Honor very much. He even ventured one day to admire her singing—he, the Vicar of St. Mark's, whose former opinion concerning music was that it was "no worse than any other noise," and who could with difficulty be persuaded to buy new chant-books for his choir, now found himself waxing eloquent on the sub-

ject of Miss Murray's singing, comparing it to "poetry set on fire, and words floating on the wings of melody," and other graceful and poetical metaphors. Valentine was highly flattered by all this homage, though she did not understand one word of the book he lent her, and only about half of the learned man's conversation.

"Your father's remarks are very improving," she would say, smothering an embryo yawn by turning it into a laugh. "But do not you ever see anyone more amusing—more of your own age, I mean?"

"We don't know anyone here," replies Honor, demurely. "Papa does not wish us to make acquaintance with any one. He says it is not safe in these continental towns."

Valentine glanced up at her quickly, and then smothered a laugh (rather a shrill, sharp one), by turning it into a

.

yawn. "Heigh-ho!" she said, and went back to her singing.

Sometimes afterwards, when Honor looked back on this part of her life, she used to wonder how at that time she could have had any thought or affection to spare for Valentine. Had not Stephen absorbed them all? And was he not coming soon to claim them? How then could there be room for any one else in her heart? She used to worry herself greatly about this. She fancied she had been disloyal to Stephen, and had given away to another that which belonged by right to him. But I think she was wrong. I think her present instincts were better than her after-thoughts. For Love is a thing that can never be spent, and the more one gives, the more one has to give; and the more one takes, perhaps, the more one wants.

And so Honor and Valentine became great friends, and their friendship gave

them much mutual satisfaction, although Honor could not help feeling at times that Valentine was not always quite in tune with her, as it were, and Valentine knew very well that her friend's way of life was different from her own.

"Perhaps that is why I like hearing about it so much," said Honor, one day, when Valentine had been expatiating upon the difference between her own vagabond life, and Honor's caged life, as she called it. "It seems to me just like a story."

And so it was, a very pretty story; but not altogether a good one, I think. And if our Honor could have heard it right through, from the beginning, or if she could have peeped on to the end, as one can do in a printed book, I think she would not have been quite so eager about turning over the pages.

As it was, however, she was deeply interested. It seemed to her a quaint, unusual, poetical sort of life, this gipsy

life of Valentine's. It was, at any rate, very unlike her own, which had been always spent amid the same brick and mortar landscapes.

But Valentine's life seemed to have been full of varying pictures, and beautiful dissolving views; each one prettier than the last. She had no Gladys, that was true. Honor pitied her for that. But then everybody could not possess a Gladys. There would be too many little girls in the world, if that were the case.

Valentine was not so absolutely alone as Honor had at first imagined. She had her *dame de compagnie*, Mademoiselle Madelon, a funny, little, nut-cracker faced old woman, who wore mittens, and a black lace veil round her head, and gossiped a great deal with Madame Pulliot, the landlady, and who was not an amusing companion for Valentine, certainly; but there might be worse—Madame Pulliot herself, for instance. And then

there was her father, who was always coming and going (it was rather unkind of him to leave her so often), and someone else in the background. Honor could not understand the half-mocking, half-pitying tone in which Valentine sometimes spoke of herself. She thought her friend's lot by no means a bad one. I suppose we all of us draw pictures of each other's conditions and characters, according to our own artistic perceptions and experiences ; and we should, no doubt, be not a little astonished were these friendly portraits to be suddenly set before us. On the whole, however, I fancy they are usually about as true to the original as those painted by ourselves, of ourselves.

And so these two went on chirruping and chattering away happily together, and exchanging their simple little confidences, and pulling down their hedges one by one. It was very foolish of them ; but it was

what every woman, worthy of the name of woman, does once at least in the course of her life. "Walk in, dear friend," she says, in the trusting generosity of her heart. "See, I have made the way clear for you. Come into my fields; pluck my daisies and buttercups; wear my jewels if they suit you; peep in at the skeleton hanging up in my cupboard—nay—do not refuse me; take the latch-key—come whenever you can."

Thus says she, pulling down her hedges, one by one, and looking rather hot over the work of demolition.

And then, by-and-by, there is robbery. The jewel-case is stolen, perhaps, or the skeleton is dragged into the light of day. And who could have done this thing save she for whom the hedges were thrown down, and the secret winding ways shown and explained? Believe me, over much trust in human nature always breeds a thief. And the worst of it is,

that the hedges once pulled down can never be replaced, except by a stone wall, high and cold and impassable.

But women when they are pulling down their hedges, never think of the walls. Honor certainly did not; but went on pulling down her hedges, and laying bare her land for her friend's inspection. There was one hedge, however, she did not touch. It was Stephen's hedge, of course, and she could not be expected to pull down that. And yet as she had destroyed so many, it was almost a pity perhaps she should leave one standing.

As for Valentine, she made a great show of pulling down her hedges, and believed she had done so quite satisfactorily. Honor thought so too. But, in truth, she had only removed a stick here and there, and pulled down a twig or two, so that on the whole her hedges were rather more intricate when she

left off, than they would have been had she never touched them.

Honor's life lay stretched out before her, like a water-colour landscape, faint indeed, but clear, in which St. Mark's Road, and the Church, and the Vicarage, together with Miss Pincock and Mr. Wynch, all stood in proper perspective and due proportions. Even the figure of a certain Stephen Aylmer was visible in the same light, and Valentine, had she been so disposed, might, no doubt, have elicited a more tangible representation of that rather misty personage. But she did not seem to care. She was perfectly satisfied with the outline presented to her.

Of Valentine's life, however, Honor had but few pictures, except those which, as I said, she painted for herself. These were, for the most part, blurred, indistinct sort of things, as Honor knew well enough. She thought it was her own

fault, her own want of skill, and slowness of apprehension. But it wasn't: it was the fault of the sitter. She was perpetually jumping about from one thing to another, and then back again. Honor found it hard work, trying to follow her, and when, after a forced march, she arrived breathless and panting at any given spot, Valentine would dart off once more like a fire-fly in a field of maize. It was very charming of her, no doubt, very clever and quick; but it was sometimes a little confusing to her friend.

"Are you really engaged to that Graf von Reichenau?" asked Honor, one day, after Valentine had been giving an extremely ingenious and ridiculous representation of that uncouth personage's words and ways. It was very wicked of her; but whenever Valentine talked like that, she could not help thinking of poor Mr. Wynch at home. "You are always

laughing at him, you cannot really be engaged."

"*Mais oui*," replied Valentine, with a tragic smile. She was sitting on the window-sill, swinging her feet. "We are betrothed—*hélas!*"

"But why—why did you do it?"

"I did not do it, *ma chère*," responded Valentine, with great solemnity. "My father did it. We met Graf von Reichenau accidentally at Marseilles in the spring of this year. Our families had been previously acquainted, through an elder brother, I think, who has been dead many years. Graf Otto is in possession of the family estates. They lie near Frankfort, and are very fine, I am told. My father made the arrangement at once. Fathers do all these things here, you know. It is very convenient, and saves one a good deal of trouble. Why does not your father find a *beau jeune homme* for you, Honor?"

Honor coloured all over, from the roots of her hair to the tips of her fingers. But Valentine's eyes were straying far away down the dingy lane, and over the red-roofed town, to where the sea in its blueness was swelling and swaying, backwards and forwards, to the music of the waves. So neither saw the other's face.

"It saves one trouble, but it also gives one trouble," continued Valentine, pensively, leaning her head against the window-frame. "Love must always be a trouble, whether one has it, or whether one is without it. Not that I have ever had any to know—oh, Honor, Honor, I wish I had!" And then this strange impetuous girl jumped down from her window-seat, and flung herself on her knees down by Honor's side, and kissed her hands, and laid her head on her lap, and cried a little, and then laughed afterwards at herself, for crying.

She was always so : a hundred things in a hundred seconds ; mocking, tender, reckless, defiant, one by one ; but enigmatical always.

Honor soothed her as best she could. She did not understand ; but understanding is not necessary to sympathy, whatever it may be to forgiveness. She always felt a little twinge of self-reproach when Valentine talked in this fashion. She could never have been so outspoken herself. Valentine would talk openly of her absent lover, but Honor never breathed a suspicion that she possessed such an article. She was frank and generous enough, in other matters ; but there are some hedges which the most confiding souls refuse to pull down, and Honor felt that this was one of them.






CHAPTER XIV.

THE LIVRE D'HEURES.

“ For God above
Is great to grant as mighty to make :
And creates the love to reward the love.”

ROBERT BROWNING.

HE house in which the Murrays lived was a new one, so far as walls and floors went, but the furniture within was of undoubted and indisputable antiquity. How many generations had sat upon those spindle-legged, creaking chairs, and looked at themselves in those blotchy smoke-dried mirrors, it was impossible to say, but they had all

been conveyed thither, the protesting chairs, and the rest of the long-suffering furniture, I mean, of course, by Madame Pulliot, a wealthy widow, who owned several houses *en ville*, and who had added this one *à la campagne* to her list as a speculation.

Madame Pulliot used to say it was a special interposition of Providence which provided her with the idea of transporting her old *meubles* (it is curious what strange forms and shapes latter-day miracles seem to take, according to some folks,) from No. 1, Place Impériale to No. 4, Avenue Mont St. Michel. No. 1, Place Impériale was fitted up with miles of stamped red velvet, and acres of looking-glasses with gilt borders. It was very hot, and dusty, and glaring. It commanded a good view of the sea and the adjacent bathing-machines, and was constantly perfumed by fishy smells from the neighbouring port. The moment it

was ready for visitors it was engaged by a charming family from Glasgow. Well-thought of ? *je crois bien*. And rich ? But so rich, they might pave a passage under the sea from France to England with gold and silver, and not feel the want of it. This charming family occupied Madame Pulliot's splendid *appartement* the whole summer, and went away rather suddenly in the autumn, the firm of MacB. & MacC., of Glasgow, having failed, and the red velvet and gilding (both of which were not a little worn) remaining unpaid for to this very day. Truly, it seems sometimes as if some other agency besides Providence had to do with these miracles after all.

Madame Pulliot came up to her little *maison de campagne*, during the summer months, for change of air, and also to look after her property, as she would say with a knowing wink. She seldom went to look after her property in the

Place Impériale, but then the MacB.'s had paid a small sum on entering, and engaged to pay a very large one on leaving the house ; whereas, *MM. les locataires* of No. 4, Avenue Mont St. Michel (the Murrys were the sole *locataires* of the tiny house, Madame Pulliot herself occupying state apartments in it) had only agreed to pay their rent weekly, and had managed to do so hitherto, in a praiseworthy, if spasmodic, sort of way. There was a small sum owing now, which gave Madame Pulliot an immense feeling of injured dignity and angelic endurance, and furnished forth the didactic part of many of her conversations with Mademoiselle Madelon.

Madame la Propriétaire and *Mademoiselle la dame de compagnie* were very good friends. It was, perhaps, rather a case of *faute de mieux*, at least, on Mademoiselle Madelon's side, as the little *dame de compagnie*, with a deep-drawn sigh, used

to own to herself and her mittens. She had been accustomed to such much better society, until—until an unfortunate dullness of hearing had come over her. But she never sighed in Madame Pulliot's presence; it was delightful to see the two old heads wagging close together, and the two generous souls exchanging delicate courtesies in the matter of coffee and gossip.

In this manner, Madame Pulliot had confided to her friend the whole history of her life. How she had been born the daughter of a small *épiciier* in the town, and at an early age had become the wife of his partner. How both men had an aptitude for saving, but in such a strange confused way, ("they would spend a louis to save a franc, *ma chère*,") that on various occasions they were brought to the brink of ruin, from which they were dragged back by her consummate talents alone. How,

after the death of both, (she seemed to have regarded them somehow in the light of twin husbands, and, in truth, the husband was scarcely a year younger than the father, and died only eight months after him,) she had caused their affairs so to prosper, under her single-handed guidance, that she might—being still not bad-looking, and a *veuve*—which some men like—and wealthy—which all suitors approve—some day, perhaps—— The story of our lives, when written by ourselves, is always profoundly interesting—to ourselves.

Mademoiselle Madelon's story was of a less sensational order. A little, quiet, drab-faced woman, not clever enough to be a governess, nor pretty enough for a *demoiselle de magasin*, nor *dévoté* enough for a *religieuse*; she had drifted naturally into the rank of *dame de compagnie*, the narrative of whose various situations sounded very dull and tame after Madame

Pulliot's more exciting and romantic autobiography. It was necessary, therefore, to import a few stirring adventures out of her employers' histories, in order to give brilliancy to her own. And this Mademoiselle Madelon did, though not so liberally as Madame Pulliot could have wished.

“*Les affaires de Monsieur votre Colonel* are keeping him away a long time,” remarked *Madame la Propriétaire* to *Mademoiselle la dame de compagnie*, one fine morning. Madame Pulliot was possessed of a sharp shrill voice, which it was a pleasure to listen to : at least so thought poor Mademoiselle Madelon, who, when most people spoke, heard little else except a sound as of wind in her ear. For her personal appearance, Madame Pulliot was round and fat, and not at all like a heroine. She had a wrinkled shining face, like a last year's apple, and a pair of bright black eyes that twinkled at

you like beads. She affected much magnificence in her dress, and wore a photographic portrait of the two deceased *épiciers* on each of her arms. Valentine detested her and her bangles almost as much as she detested Madame Pléon.

“*Oui, oui,*” nodded Mademoiselle Madelon. “Monsieur is absent a long time because he has gone a long way. He has gone to visit the future home of *Mademoiselle sa fille*, and to make arrangements about the marriage.”

“*Avec ce gros garçon d’Allemand?*” inquired Madame Pulliot. She had heard it all before, but there are two subjects one is never tired of discussing; one’s own good fame, and one’s neighbour’s ill name.

Mademoiselle Madelon nodded again. She was no recluse, not she, and she liked to *jaser* as well as anyone, but there were limits to all conversation. Madame

Pulliot had not hitherto been much accustomed to good society.

“*Je n’aime pas les Allemands, moi,*” continued Madame Pulliot, consciously or unconsciously impenetrable; “*mais, ma foi,* I am sorry for that *jeune homme*. Is the marriage to be soon, *chère amie*?”

“*Je n’en sais rien,*” replied Mademoiselle Madelon, pursing up her lips. Madame Pulliot was certainly over-stepping the limits of polite conversation now, and it was only friendly to bar further outbreaks of ignorance by a stone wall of dignity. Besides, when one is in possession of anything coveted by some one else, one likes to dispose of it in one’s own way, and at one’s own time.

“Will the marriage take place from this house?” asked Madame Pulliot, again. The question was one of personal interest to her; and she was meditating whether the red velvet sofas from the

Place Impériale might be hired out for the occasion, and how much she could make M. le Colonel pay for them.

But Mademoiselle Madelon replied again,

“*Je n'en sais rien, Madame.*” She was certainly not well-bred, *cette pauvre* Pulliot.

“It will neither be here, nor there nor anywhere else,” cried Madame Pulliot irritated beyond the power of profiting by her companion’s genteel example. “*Je les connais bien, moi, ces gens là*; and you will do so, some day, my poor friend—when it is too late, perhaps; and then maybe you will regret never having a word to fling to your faithful Pauline Pulliot. *Mais tenez, voilà la fille du Ministre Anglais*, who comes to visit your *demoiselle*. *Bonjour, Mademoiselle*, your friend awaits you with impatience,” (this is addressed with great politeness to Honor, who passes by, smiling at the two old women hobnobbing together at the garden-gate.)

“It astonished me somewhat how a *demoiselle si doux* as that one is *apparemment*, can be friends with your *petite ogresse*. No doubt, however, it is well it should be so. The good must be mixed with the bad, the wheat with the chaff, else the world would be a far worse place than it is, and you and I, *chère amie*, might never have been bound together by the cords of so tender a friendship.”

With which parting philosophic, and poetic shot, the wheat and chaff in question parted suddenly, as if blown asunder by a breath of cold wind.

Meanwhile Honor had found Valentine awaiting her with impatience no doubt, but for the time smothering her feelings by burying her head in the depths of a small cow-skin covered trunk. She was so engrossed by this occupation, that she did not hear her friend enter.

“What are you doing?” cried Honor,

looking round with an amused glance. And indeed she might well ask.

The whole place was strewn with a variety of miscellaneous articles, bonnets and boots, dresses of an antique shape and faded grace, all the paraphernalia of a lady's toilet, even a child's toy or two, scattered here and there, and all lying together and sticking to one another in the most lover-like manner possible, till it seemed as if the contents of a (limited) co-operative store had been emptied out upon the floor. And there, in the corner, knelt Valentine with her head in the box, like a cat in a cream-jug.

"Are you preparing for a sudden departure?" asked Honor, ruthlessly trying to separate a silk apron from an india-rubber shoe, which from their venerable appearance and unwillingness to sever, seemed to have been partners for years. "It reminds me of a sketch of a picture, to be called the 'Flight of the Israelites,'

which Stephen ——, which a friend of ours once made, and showed me. He would have been quite delighted with this scene."

The cat in the cream-jug looked up.

"I am afraid we are rather like the Israelites sometimes, and do spoil the Egyptians," she said, wincing a little. "But we are not going away just yet. Do you wish we were, Honor?"

Honor shook her head, and laughed. And then the natural answer, and ordinary greetings took place between the girls. "You have grown to like Pierreport pretty well, after all," says Honor.

Valentine owned that she had done so. "It will always seem like a sort of home to me," she said with a sigh. There was something very touching in this young vagabond's vague, undefined idea of a home.

"Do you always travel about with all

this baggage?" said Honor, looking round again and laughing.

"Oh dear no!" said Valentine, with one of her sudden changes of voice and manner. "We generally travel about with a tooth-brush apiece, and leave our boxes behind us to be picked up next time we pass that way. This one must have been left here some years ago, and my father found it at the Custom-house, and told me to open it, and see if there happened to be anything in it worth having. But I have not come upon much yet except baby-clothes."

She had knelt down before the box once more, and was laughing as she pulled out the little frocks, pink and blue and lilac cotton, common enough, but neatly made, as if by a mother's fingers.

"Were they yours?" asked Honor, to whom the sight of little garments always appealed tenderly.

"I suppose so—I don't remember,"

answered Valentine carelessly. "Ha—what's this?"

"This," was a little well-worn *livre d'heures*; bound in faded purple velvet, with a tarnished silver clasp, and the name, "Edmée" engraved on the clasp.

"What a dear little book!" cried Honor, as Valentine held it up. "To whom did that belong?"

"I do not know," said Valentine, absently. She was looking at the name on the clasp, and trying to recall something that came looming towards her, vaguely and dimly through the mist of years—as one tries to make out the outline of a church tower through a London fog.

"Who was Edmée?" asked Honor. "Was it your mother's name?"

"No—my mother's name was Arlotte. I know that much, or rather that little. My father never speaks of her, and all I know is that she came from Provence,

and had some property there, which was sold at her death. I wish it had not been sold !”

“I suppose he loved her so much, he could not live there without her, and cannot bear to speak of her,” said Honor with unconscious satire. She remembered how her father had mourned the loss of his wife, and, consciously or unconsciously, most of our views of the outer world are drawn from home pictures; at any rate when one is still young and a tyro at the art. “Do you not know who Edmée was ?” asked Honor again.

“Not I,” returned Valentine, running back to her old laughing way. “Some penurious old frump, I should say, who wore out everything to its last stitch before buying another. Why are you so much interested in the matter, Honor ?” she asked, laying the book down on the table.

“I do not know,” replied Honor,

growing dreamy in her turn. "Only it seems so sad to have lived and loved once, and been loved too, perhaps, in return, and after that to be buried away for ever so long; and then by-and-by to wake up again, and find that the world has forgotten one altogether—even one's name. Like the book, you know."

"About the book, I do not know," said Valentine, laughing still, but sighing a little at the same time. "But I think it must be better to have been loved once, even if one is buried for good and all afterwards, than never to be loved at all."

"Oh, but that could never be," cried Honor quickly. "Being loved, is surely the same thing as loving. I mean, if one has the power of loving, as most of us have, one is certain also to get the gift of being loved."

"I hope you may find it so, *ma chère*," returned Valentine, in her most sarcastic, worldly wise way.

“I am sure I shall,” said Honor, lifting up her sweet lucid eyes. “Not perhaps always in exactly the same way, or in equal proportion, but sooner or later, in some way or other, I am certain, Love’s seed must bear Love’s flower.”





CHAPTER XV.

TWO ABRIVALS.

“ A little while a little love
The hour yet bears for thee and me,
Who have not drawn the veil to see
If yet our heaven be lit above.”

DANTE G. ROSSETTI.



AFTER that speech of Honor's,
the girls sat for a while in
silence.

It was a lovely fresh morning. The sea danced to and fro, like a child at play. The earth was its mother, looking on and smiling. The sun laughed like a great, glad god, and did his best to make others laugh too. He was not an idle god either,

for he had already swept the sky clear of cobwebs, and was now warming the air with his breath, and flinging down his jests upon the sea, in a stream of broken beams. Far away, over there, sky, and sea, and air seemed to meet and mingle together, and resolve themselves, as it were, into a three-fold chord; but here, close at hand, they were as single notes, vibrating separately, but each in answer to "the dominant's persistence,"—good things in themselves, and glad, but gladder still, by the power of the sun.

"There is the English steamer coming in," said Valentine, who was sitting, as usual, in her favourite window-seat, "I wonder if it has brought anything, or anyone, for either of us."

It was a very harmless speculation, wasn't it? Nevertheless Honor blushed furiously as she heard it. She was sitting at the table, mending her friend's gloves;

for, notwithstanding her vague desires for a home-life, Valentine Murray was entirely destitute of any idea of home ways and home duties. In the earlier days of their friendship, Honor had tried to instruct her in the mysteries of the needle. But Valentine had proved unteachable. She could learn best by watching, she said; and Honor, good, painstaking Honor, had given her what instructions she could in that manner. She moved away suddenly now from her seat facing the light to the further end of the room, under pretext of getting some more silk.

"Perhaps your father will come by that boat," she said, forcing her lips to speak. She was so angry with herself for blushing.

"Not my father," said Valentine, watching her friend's face rather than her hands this time. She was not much given to observation as a rule, but she could not help seeing that something had stirred

and moved that usually calm, still, undemonstrative Honor. She made no remark, however, but went on with her own subject. "My father is not coming from England, but from Germany—from somewhere near Frankfort, I believe, in which favoured district the Castle of Reichenau is situated. Do you know those parts? No? Well, perhaps you will do so someday. Perhaps you will honour with a visit some friends of yours who may happen to be living there."

"I think you had better honour us with a visit in London, first," said Honor, impulsively. And the moment after she was sorry she had given the invitation. What would her father say? What would little Gladys say? What would Mr. Wynch and Miss Pincock, and various other parishioners say, to this strange, foreign, gipsy sort of girl she was proposing to introduce among them?

The gipsy, however, accepted the invitation, quite gravely.

"I should like to go to England very much," she said, "I have never been there. My father says the air does not suit him."

It was really a pity there was no one present to understand the unconscious sarcasm of this speech. Valentine, might have had a dim inkling as to her own meaning. Honor had none. She came back to her seat by the table, quite calmly and quietly, but without the silk she had been to fetch.

Valentine resumed her attentive contemplation of the dingy lane, and the little town glistening in the hollow, and the sea shining like the sky beyond. Honor was no longer so interesting to watch.

Suddenly she exclaimed—

"Someone *has* arrived after all, though. I hear a sound!—I see a form!—a man!

—my father? Yes, it is my father. I must go down and prepare his mind for an interview with his daughter's preserver." And she jumped down from her perch, and ran away.

The greeting between father and daughter was not, however, a lengthy process. Almost immediately after Valentine's departure, the pair entered the *salon* together, and Colonel Murray was presented to Honor.

She recognised him at once as the elder of the two gentlemen who had been walking in the lane that morning when she had strolled into it, unawares, with Gladys; and even had she not done so, she would have known him anywhere from his strange likeness to Valentine. They had the same great grey eyes, and handsome, clear-cut features, straight brows, and curling lips,—even the same chins, peaked and pointed, "hard and bright." Honor had never noticed Valentine's chin

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before, but she looked at it now, and then back at her father's. It was one of those straight hard chins, such as sometimes appear to belong to the musician type of face, and are always indicative of a determined, pitiless, cruel character on the part of the possessor. Honor, however, was not learned in Lavater, and had probably never heard of *Faustina Imperatrix*, so the likeness between the chins struck her merely as a curious link between the father and daughter.

Their voices were alike, too; many-toned, and wide of compass. They were like many-stringed instruments, capable of playing any kind of tune. The tune Colonel Murray was playing now was a psalm, deep and full, with a grand bass like a rolling wave.

"I am so rejoiced to think that my daughter should have found such kind friends during my absence," he said; and then he sat down by Honor's side,

and asked her about her home and family, and thanked her again for the service she had rendered to him and his daughter.

Being thanked is, perhaps, a pleasant process to some folks ; but Honor did not like it, and never knew what to say in return. She did not like Colonel Murray, either, and wished he would talk to his daughter instead of to her. It might be more polite to talk to her, but it seemed rather unnatural. She tried to picture to herself how her own father would have acted under the circumstances.

It was difficult, for Mr. Carmichael hardly ever left home, and Honor had never been separated from him for more than a few hours each day. But she could fancy his coming back after some such absence, and looking at his children, and saying nothing ; and then finding his books, and pretending to read, but looking at them still, over the tops of the

pages. Once, such a picture, or such a reality, would have made her angry ; but she did not think either would do so now. Silence would at least be better than this ceaseless babble to a stranger.

It is sad but true, that we seldom appreciate the comforts of our own homes until we peep in and behold the cold, cheerless, cushionless rooms of our neighbours ; never know how well our own shoes fit, until we see how painfully our brothers' toes are pinched. This may be a selfish satisfaction, no doubt—of the earth, earthy—and yet let us go down on our knees, and pray God it may come to each of us before we are homeless, or have to go barefoot.

Honor wished she could go away. It seemed to her that she was intruding here ; but it had been previously arranged that her father and Gladys should walk up and fetch her away in the afternoon. She had no choice but to wait.

She waited impatiently, however, looking at her watch now and then, and out of the window continually, thereby losing much of the Colonel's interesting conversation.

"I was on the Rhine yesterday, and at Strasburg last night," he was saying, in his melodious voice. "The weather was very fine; but the season is certainly more advanced there than it seems to be here. All the wall-fruit was gathered, that is, it was in the neighbourhood of Frankfort, where I have been staying. Do you know that part of the world, Miss Carmichael?" he asked, in almost the same words, in which his daughter had put the same question.

Honor, hearing herself addressed by name, turned round, and confessed that she did not know that part, nor indeed any part of Germany, in fact had never been out of England before.

"It is a beautiful part of the world,"

continued the Colonel. "And the place at which I was staying is magnificent." And then he enlarged on the splendours of Schloss Reichenau, and the kindness and hospitality of its owner.

Honor glanced at Valentine. This was probably intended for her edification, and she was malicious enough to expect to see her friend's cheeks become suddenly tinted by the same uncomfortable, uninvited artist, who had rushed upon her and painted her own a little while since. But she was disappointed. Valentine sat in her window-seat, perfectly calm and cool, and provokingly indifferent. She did not even turn aside her head.

"Are you preparing for a fancy ball, Valentine?" asked Colonel Murray, suddenly breaking off in his panegyrics of Schloss Reichenau, and addressing his daughter. He glanced round the room as he spoke. It was a lovely afternoon. Everything outside seemed to be flooded

with rivers of golden light. Inside, the stream was less abundant, less full, but it flowed in nevertheless, straying over the girls' heads and hands, and flinging a shower of bright firework sort of light on the piles of clothes, heaped up here and there on the floor.

Valentine began to explain whence these objects had come, and the nature of her afternoon's occupation. Her father did not seem to be listening much. His eyes were following the zig-zagging course of a sunbeam.

"What's that?" he said, with a start, as the sunbeam, or his eyes, lighted at last on the shining clasp of the little "Book of Hours," with its well-worn edges, and deeply engraved name. "Where did that come from?"

"It came out of the old box," replied Valentine. "I turned it out amongst the other things. It was hardly worth putting into the box, I should

have thought; such a shabby little thing as it is."

Colonel Murray did not answer. It *was* a shabby little thing. There was no possibility of contradicting that statement. But then to some of us shabby things say more than any amount of brand new ones. They speak a language we knew long ago, and thoughts we had forgotten, till we hear it sound unexpectedly again.

Honor looked round at the little book, and then back at the Colonel. Perhaps he knows to whom it belonged, she said to herself. Why does not Valentine ask? And then she forgot all about the matter, and listened eagerly for her moment of release.

It came at last.

"I see them, Honor," announced Valentine, from the post of observation. "Here comes Gladys running on a-head, and your father behind, and another

gentleman with him—young—tall—handsome—dark. Who is it, Honor?"

But Honor did not answer, because she did not hear the question. She was down, and away, and out in the lane, before Valentine had finished making her comments.

"Stephen—Stephen!" she cried, running out towards him.

"Dear Honor, are you glad to see me?" he said, as he caught, and held her hands in his.

That was all. Several pairs of eyes were watching them, of which fact Honor became immediately and painfully conscious. There was the father looking round puzzled at his daughter's unusual exuberance of delight; there was the little sister gazing up wonderingly, and the friend peering through the garden-gate, with her quick keen glance; while from above, another pair of eyes, inscrutable as the Sphinx's, cold and grey

as northern icebergs, looked down upon the scene.

"Good-bye, Valentine," said Honor, pushing her bright, happy face through the bars of the gate, and kissing her friend's cheek. But she did not say, "I shall see you to-morrow," or "When shall we meet next?" as she usually said when they parted. She forgot all about that, or perhaps she had not time, for Mr. Aylmer came up just then, and drew her away.

"Who is your friend?" he asked, as they walked away, side by side, out of earshot.

"Her name is Valentine Murray," replied Honor. "She is really a great friend of mine. I will tell you how she became so by-and-by. Don't you think her beautiful?" asked the girl, enthusiastically.

"Beautiful—no!" replies Stephen, emphatically. "She is handsome, I sup-

pose; but I scarcely looked at her, I was looking at—something better, I think. But you must tell me now, at once, how she became your great friend, or else I shall be jealous, little Honor.”

Honor told him, as quickly as she could. It was a long story; but she cut it short. She was so anxious to come to the end. “And now, Stephen, tell me all that has happened to you since—since that night, when we said good-bye to each other?”

“Nothing has happened to me, dear,” said Stephen, rather sadly. “I have not even heard from my uncle in India. I suppose he has gone up to the hills, or to some place or other where letters do not follow him. Or perhaps he may have nothing to offer me, and so does not write.” (Honor’s face, bright already, grew brighter still at these words) “Anyhow, I thought I might as well await my

fate in France as in England. Something seemed to draw me here. Can you guess what that something was, Honor?"

Honor looked up shyly, and smiled a little. Stephen caught her hand in his, and pressed it with a confident, re-assuring glance. They both thought they knew, or had guessed, at any rate. But alas! guess-work is a poor thing, and knowledge is finite, and neither of them hit the truth that summer's night at Pierreport.

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2

